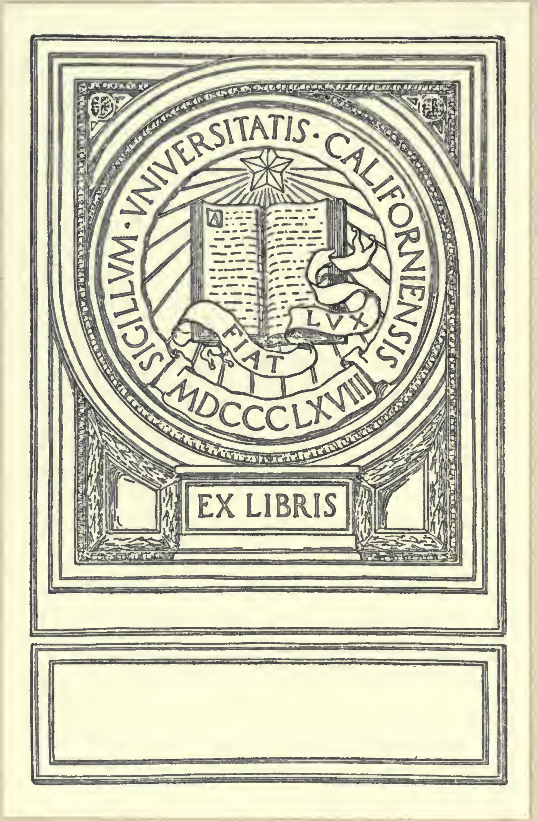

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MANNA IN THE DESERT

MANNA
IN THE DESERT

A REVELATION OF
THE GREAT KARROO

BY

ALFRED DE JAGER JACKSON

> "There is food in the air, nourishment upon the earth, sustenance in the ground, and provision beneath the soil. There is also much food for the mind. 'There is manna in the desert!'"—*Chapter on Animal Life, Part I.*

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TO

MY SONS

DUDLEY

REGINALD

AND

CECIL

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.

MAY IT BE

A BOND OF UNION

BETWEEN US

ALWAYS

M193229

ERRATA.

The illustration on page 37 is "The Old Dorp."
The illustration on page 65 is "The Old Homestead."
Page 28, line 29: for "scared" read "seared."
Page 44, line 19 for "economies" read "economics."
Page 48, line 9 for "of" read "or"
Page 107, line 3 for "here" read "rare."
Page 280, line 4 for "monkey" read "donkey."

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THE OLD HOMESTEAD ON THE KARROO FARM . . 37

The summit of the mountain is flanked by the great precipice (facing the homestead) where the vultures breed and the eagles build their eyries. On the left are the shearing-house, wool-room, smithy, store and other outbuildings—also the kraals. The dwelling is on the right, and in the right foreground are the dipping-pit, tanks, kraals and windmill, with "tent wagon" and orchard showing behind the windmill. The foreground shows the broad dyke in the river-bed where Holding was sucked under in his tremendous swim.

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The author slept in this house in 1866. It was long known as "The Old Place," and had a pretty row of almond trees in front.

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THE BOOK

OBJECT: To draw men towards a right and reverent regard of Nature, particularly as exemplified in the Great Karroo, in the abundance and variety of its animal life, in the wealth, diversity, and complexity of its plant life, in its splendid skies, and in the intense contrasts of its natural features, both of air and of earth. When a man is old and can still regard with full interest the little toiling ants, if the perfume of a sweet flower yet breathes incense to his soul, if the caress of his good dog still thrills his heart, and the handgrip of a friend has not ceased to give him great pleasure, then, though he may have no money, he is endowed with large riches. But if he is going down the hill of life, and all these things are meaningless to him, then, although he may have many possessions, and be surrounded by the fawning friends of his prosperity, yet is he poor indeed.

PLAN: (1) Definition and description of the Karroo.

(2) An appeal to races and sects to come together and read the Book of Nature.

(3) The introductory chapter is the soul of the book, that permeates and quickens it; it invests the

desert with the glory that belongs to it, and gives an exalted interpretation of its natural aspects, and its human, animal and plant life, showing the inherent and inevitable contrasts—rains and droughts, smiles and frowns, plenty and want, joy and sorrow, life and death ; it concludes with a passionate appeal to all manhood to come and revel in the wonders of creation and be naturally responsive, heart and soul : finally is a panegyric to the Great Creator that broods over all, the " Father of Light and of Harmony " that rules over all, the bright beacon that illumines the way, the guiding voice that calls to all nations, in the marvellous works of Nature, that are daily revealed upon earth, and that shine forth nightly in the great universe.

(4) Then follow chapters on farming (and farm-life), animal, and plant life, comprising a third part of the book.

(5) Next come the human lives, which are real, men of strong individuality, that have passed away with the conditions that produced them. They were the humble, hard, and faithful toilers—Nature's nobility. The lives of pets and other animals, and some adventures, in connection, follow, giving true facts and faithful pictures, and tacitly inviting the regard and sympathy of mankind for all the dumb creation. Interspersed in the book are some relative philosophies and reflections, and some local witticisms and anecdotes, the whole accounting for a score of pages.

(6) This brings us down to the last few chapters, that deal with drought and erosion, their lessons, and original suggestions to combat the effects ;

with the destruction and preservation of animal life, and an appeal against needless sacrifice, showing the evils wrought thereby: with the pleasures and benefits of keeping pets, and practical suggestions for the amelioration of their lives: the Valedictory—a solemn, final, and pathetic leave-taking, in the evening of life, of the old homestead on the Karroo Farm, and the great wide veld and all that belongs to it, with its many lifelong associations.

There are illustrations that serve to make the contents more realistic, and to vivify the impressions.

PREFACE

IT is customary to write a preface. I should be sorry to think my book needed one. It might do without it. I am sure that the preface would not do without the book. I would suggest that you read the book first. Then the preface would not matter. If you read the preface first and left the book, it would matter very much—to me!

The book gives you a true picture of farming in the Great Karroo as it was in the olden days, and to the greater extent still is. It views the various aspects of farm-life as it then was, but no longer is. It gives a faithful description of animal, reptile, bird, insect, and plant life in that Karroo. It is written by one of Nature's sons who speaks from fifty years' association, and of personal and intimate knowledge. It shows you the lives of a few humble men who worked on the Karroo farm, and tells you how noble were some of those lives. It gives brief sketches of others that came from over the sea, from out of the sea, from many climes and many places, and went away to other places and into the Far Beyond. It renders you a true account of the lives of many pets, wild and domestic, and tells you of their worth. It gives an exact account of remarkable and strange adventures that can be verified at this day. It shows you the Karroo in the evil days of its drought, its nakedness, and its barrenness, and it hides nothing. It shows it to you in the halcyon days of the rains, beautifully garbed, fruitful and thrice-blessed, and it adds nothing. It tries to lay bare to you the thoughts that have come into the heart of the writer, the wonderful voices that he has heard and fancied, the glorious lights, and the lights of glory that he has seen and imagined, in those vast solitudes, in those great valleys, on those rugged mountains, and in those splendid skies.

The author has written straight from the heart, often with a lump in the throat and with burning eyes, with painful and also with pleasurable emotions, and he has altered nothing.

SUPPLEMENTARY

YOU jaded men of the city, you tired clerks with shoulders stooping over monotonous desks, you toil-worn factory-hands, you that labour underground far away from the light of Heaven, you that work in the banks, in the offices, in the stores, in the market-places, and are weary :

You striving politicians, you men of divided races, you of many creeds and many religions, you of many beliefs and many opinions, you of many hopes and many fears, of many loves and many hates, of many pains and many sorrows, of great desires and grievous disappointments, of deep longings and long waitings :

You who have strayed and been cast into prisons, you who have lost hope and are going down the hill of despair, you whose lives are cast in pleasant places, and you poor outcasts of the earth, you that are filled and you that are hungry, you men of letters and you that cannot read, come and look upon the Book of Nature—for all may look and all may read—and turn over its gracious pages.

They are full of beauty, of wisdom, and of wonder. They will tell you much. They will shed light upon the dark places. They will sweeten your hopes, still your fears, glorify your love, soften your hate, ease your pains, soothe your sorrows, calm your desires, compensate your disappointments, satisfy your longings, and give you patience in your long waitings.

You may also stand in the solitudes, you may look across the great valleys, you may behold the rugged mountains and gaze upon those splendid skies.

Afrikanders, Dutch and English, come to the universal meeting-ground, where one kind thought makes us all kin, learn of great Nature, be natural men, banish vain pretences, and subdue empty insincerities, sink and forget your differences, and be MEN and BROTHERS!

THE KARROO

THE Great Karroo is that part of the Cape Province which lies between the Nieuwveld Range on the north, with its continuations, and the Great Zwart Bergen on the south, with its extensions, and forms an elevated plateau about 3,000 feet above the sea-level. It may be said to include the divisions of Laingsburg, Beaufort West, Prince Albert, Aberdeen and Willowmore.

The Little Karroo lies south of the Great Karroo, between the Groot Zwart Bergen as its northern boundary, and the Lange Bergen, with its continuing ranges eastward, as its Southern limit. It may be taken to embrace the divisions of Montagu, Ladismith, Oudtshoorn, Uniondale, and the greater part of George. It is also an extensive plateau of an average elevation of about 2,000 feet above the sea.

There are no strictly appointed geographical bounds to these vast tableland tracts. As I have defined them, they cover an area about 200 miles longitudinally, with a latitude of about 100 miles, and comprise a surface of some 20,000 square miles in extent. The Great Karroo is by far the larger of these tracts, and contains fully four-fifths of the joint area, or about 16,000 square miles. This book deals especially and more particularly with the larger portion, known as the Great Karroo.

Karroo is a Hottentot word signifying *desert.* Similarly, *Gouph* is a Bushman word having a like significance. " The Gouph " is a name given to a tract of country embracing the great plains of Beaufort West, and comprising all but the most northern portion of this division, which portion is known as the " Nieuwveld "—*New* Veld.

The average annual rainfall of the Great Karroo is about 8 inches. Its outstanding feature is, therefore, its great aridity, that contributes to other subsidiary features, such as the sparseness of its scrubby vegetation, the comparative dearth of trees, and the nakedness of its hills and mountains. Another characteristic is the prevailing shallowness of its stony soil. These features and this characteristic may, however, be said to apply to the Cape Colony in general, excluding of course the coastal belts, the South-Western Province, the Eastern Province, and also the Little Karroo.

Nearly the whole of the rainfall occurs during the summer months, January being the most favoured period as a rule.

The Great Karroo is also marked for the brackishness of most of the soil in the plains and the accompanying brackishness of nearly all the springs that occur in these plains. Thirty-five years ago I was driving through the Western Gouph, and I unharnessed my horses near a dam that was more than half full of rain-water. The catchment of the dam comprised a large " brakpan." It was a hot day, and just on noon. The horses were thirsty; but though they sniffed at it, they could not drink the water, so brackish was it. My companion was also very thirsty, so we walked to a house one hundred yards lower down; but it was locked, and there was no one at home. In front of the house was a piece of new garden-ground, enclosed by a mimosa-thorn fence. There were mealies, pumpkins, and a fine patch of water-melons, all growing luxuriantly. I took a running jump over the fence, plucked a melon, and jumped back again. We sat on the door-step, ate the fruit, and left the peels neatly packed on the spot, to show our good faith! Now, that garden was irrigated from the dam. In three years at the most, the soil would have been corrupted by the salt water. It would have become necessary to prepare the adjoining ground if the owner wished to carry on his gardening.

The nakedness of the hills and mountains is greatly accentuated by the extensive outcrop of rock on the sides and the summits, and the masses of reddish-brown and black iron-stone boulders that lie on the slopes. Even the lower hills and ridges are flanked by these boulders, and the tops are in many instances piled up in tiers of the huge stones, leaving no room for any vegetation. The weight of many of these boulders runs into several tons each, and some are so metallic that, if struck by another stone, they will ring like a bell.

At Nel'spoort Railway Station, situated at the foot of one of those iron-stone hills, a Yankee stepped out of a train that had halted. It was noon on a blazing hot day in a great drought, about thirty years ago. He stared and blinked at the great hill as it shimmered in the sun, and ejaculated: "Lord! what a wilderness! What a ghastly wilderness!" Then he got back into his carriage and slammed the door after him. All of which was very natural. One could hardly imagine "love at first sight" under such conditions. Had he returned later, in the time of the rains, when Nature smiles again, and visited some of the pretty homesteads and fair orchards that dot the country, he would assuredly have met with a pleasant surprise, and might, with justice, have spoken in kindlier terms of the Great Karroo.

LIKENESS OF THE KARROO

INTRODUCTORY

TO what shall we liken this Great Karroo, the desert of frowns and of smiles, the land of drought and rains, the place of the lean and the fat kine, the home of want and of plenty, the wilderness of desolation and the garden of beauty, the country of sadness and of many joys, the barren plains and the fields of fragrant flowers, the dead mountains that yet hold so much life, the house of sorrow and yet of much rejoicing ?

Let us regard it first in the days of its sadness and desolation ; but let us look when the darkness of night has enwrapped it in its soft, sheltering mantle, and mercifully covered its leanness and its nakedness. It is like a wonderful but sad woman, in her plain garments of dreary drab and sombre brown, that are hidden in the blackness. Her brow is covered with beautiful, resplendent stars, that shine and smile away the frown of the desert. On her noble head are the raven-black tresses of night that become her so well, and she looks stately and gracious, for her sadness and sorrow are hidden. And we hear the pretty cries of the night-birds, that make her seem less lonely, and soften the harshness of her desolation.

We look again at the rise of the early sun. The raven-locks are now all golden and radiant, for they are lit up by the rays of the morning orb. But gone are the resplendent stars, and there are heavy dews upon her brow, and they hang upon her lashes, for she weeps, though she yet tries to smile bravely. The early north-wind gently stirs her garments of sombre brown, and it gathers from them the fragrance of the sweet herbs. It kisses away the sad dews upon her brow and her eyes, and as a peace-offering it wafts the sweet fragrance afar. It comes graciously and laden with its precious moisture to the nostrils, and you feel and know that the rains will also come, and wash off the lines and the tears of sorrow, and drive away the want and the leanness and the barrenness.

From far up above and away comes the screech of the great eagle. He launches himself into the void. He is bound for the valleys and the plains, where he knows there is still much life among the brown stones and those drab bushes, where the steenbok hide, and the young springbok lie down. The song of birds is borne on the freshening wind of the morning, the lizards are astir, and the cool and balmy air is ahum with insect life. The bees yet seek their honey among the brown herbs, in the mimosa flowers and the karree blossom. The beetles, the working ants, the creeping and the crawling things of earth are busy, and diligently searching for a livelihood.

But the burning orb mounts to the zenith, it passes the meridian, and declines to the angle when its rays smite down still more fiercely upon man and beast, when the glowing, blazing sky of brass blinds their shrinking eyes, and they droop in the early afternoon heat. Gone are the birds under the boughs and into the thickets, and their song is hushed. The lizards dance upon the hot stones and the blistering sands as they cross in search of shelter. The tender insects have hidden away, and the bees have ceased their labours beyond the precincts of the hive. The beetles, the ants, and the creeping things have sought their holes and their hollows, and gotten themselves out of the scorching flame. Man and beast seek the shade of the bush. The poor, lean, panting sheep thrust their heads beneath the taller shrubs, and some drop where they stand, to rise no more. The dogs crawl into the thick of the bush, and lie with jaws agape and lolling tongues, gasping in distress.

Our sad lady droops in weariness of spirit, her mournful eyes shed no tears, for they are scorched in the drought of their sorrow. She is bowed down in the travail of her suffering, her brow is furrowed, and her face is pinched and dried; she labours sorely as an expectant mother of many sorrows ; her poor, shoddy drab and brown garments are but a scanty covering, and the devouring rays search and blister the bare places. Her state is pitiful. She is no longer to be desired. She is forlorn, and her desolation is great.

The westering sun sinks low. The bees and the ants, the beetles and the creeping things have another busy round in the cool of the late afternoon, and further the work of a day foreshortened by the heat. Men and dogs, the beasts and the sheep hasten to the pools and the water-holes, and drown their sorrows in the reviving draught. Some of the poor, lean flock fall down by the way, and others drop at the water-pools. They do not get up again. They succumb under the unequal struggle. It is terrible, and it is grievously hard.

But there are those that do not care. With them it is even a time of feasting, though they never rejoice. The horrible "Aasvogels"—*Carrion birds*, or vultures—wait near by with mirthless, down-drawn curves to the corners of their cruel beaks, with heads sunken low between their bowed shoulders, and the eternal ashes upon their ugly bald pates, as a fitting token of their wretchedness. Thus do they hold the burlesque funeral obsequies of their victims, and make mock sorrow at their hard fate, and the dearth and famine that yet yield them many banquets.

Our mournful and desolate lady revives in the grateful cool of the evening, her dress is less shrunken, and the lines and the furrows on her face are smoothed away. The gracious stars shine once more upon that noble brow, the night envelops her in the raven-tresses, and she smiles her sweet, sad smile.

But the days of drought and desolation, of a scared, smileless, sorrowing desert are numbered, and its burning, blistering sands that ran so slowly are now also running out.

RAIN! RAIN!! RAIN!!! Thank God for the rain! It comes softly, it patters on the thatched roof, and it makes—oh!—such sweet music on the iron shed! It falls gently on the dry sand and on the parched earth, that suck it up greedily, and yet so gratefully. All the long evening, throughout the hours of night and till late in the morning it pours down its blessing and its moisture for the life and the healing of the nations of men and the kingdoms of beasts. Sometimes the dread cold wind comes too, and blows keenly upon the wet surfaces, and the weaker ones and the lean ones perish in many scores at the goal, and on the very borders of the land of promise. It is sad; but it is the last wrench. The sun comes forth and spreads abroad its warming beams of light. The poor, patient, dumb animals leave their kraals. The lean ones run and leap for joy, and the weak ones wag their heads and try to make sport. Some even run a little; but they cannot leap. The days of tribulation and of much suffering are now past, and there is great rejoicing.

But the showers do not always come softly and gently, as if in chastened mood after their long confinement. There are times when they grow impatient and angry, and they beat upon their prison bars. You hear their mutterings and their moanings as they strive to be free. At last they burst asunder their bonds, and break open the windows of Heaven. They pour down furiously and in wrathful flood. Their glistening eyes blaze in the lurid lightning, and their passionate voices shout aloud in the dreadful thunder. They smite upon the homesteads and beat upon the plains, they batter with all their strength upon the walls, they shatter themselves on the hills and upon the great brown stones, and vainly spend themselves against the mountain rocks. In their fierceness they pour out vast floods that strive to find a resting-place; but there is not room for them. The waters are too many. They boom thunderously and with reverberating echoes down the riven mountain side, they fill the dry courses of the great river channels, they flow over the plains, they burst their banks and rush down the valleys. They struggle, they fight, they leap, they roar in their madness, they carry death and destruction as they hasten headlong in clamorous and deafening turmoil towards the great sea, where there is room for all.

The dread storm has passed. There is weeping for a hapless one who was caught accidentally or unawares, and was swept beyond the reach of all storms. There is lamentation over houses that were not founded upon rocks, and the dams that were overwhelmed. There is sorrow for the sheep and all the dumb animals, victims of the swift death and sudden destruction. But the harrowing, burning, blistering drought is also gone. Sorrow for the dead is assuaged by time. Better houses are built upon surer foundations, the dams are restored, and other damage is repaired. The flocks and the animals grow fat, and they multiply. There is peace and plenty, thankfulness and much joy.

And what now of the wonderful woman, the sad lady with the mournful eyes? Can it be? Yes! the very, very same; but oh! how wondrous, how exceedingly and marvellously changed! Those scant garments of drab and of brown now hang in ample folds of rich and pleasing green. The blistered bareness is covered, and there is no nakedness. The luxuriant robes sweep the plains in a majestic train, and the brown stones are hidden. There are gorgeous flounces of white, of pale yellow, of pink and of purple, and there are many beautiful patterns and verdant borderings. Woven in the fabric of those flounces are the white "geilblom"—*luxuriant flower*—resurrected from its grave in the sandy soil; the pale-yellow blossoming "granaatbosch"—*pomegranate-bush*—that was but now a bundle of dry sticks; the pink flowering "vijgebosch"—*fig-bush*—that was in the blackness of death; the purple "kraaitulp"—the *crow* or *rook tulip*—in reality the wild purple iris, that has been born of its bulb in earth's dark womb, and has unfolded its glories to the light of Heaven. Embroidered in the patterns are the rich yellow "boter-blom"—*butter flower*—that has come up once more in the place that had ceased to know it; also many multi-coloured and sweet flowering herbs, and the borderings are beautified with sweet and rich green grasses.

Our noble lady smiles graciously, and her breasts are covered with choicest flowers. Garlands of fragrant herbs hang around her neck and on her shapely shoulders. Her brow is radiant—surely those lines and those furrows could never have been!

—and her eyes are lustrous and splendid. There is a halo of golden glory o'er her head, that dazzles under the rays of the brilliant sun. She wears a comely chaplet of soft green mosses that is cooling and refreshing to the sight. She is a queen, and she is crowned with great glory by the deft and unerring hand of Nature.

And her smile is wonderously bewitching, and the breath of her nostrils is alluring with the odour of the sweet soothing herbs. Her tresses waft the honied sweetness of the golden mountain grasses, and her garments exhale intoxicating scents of rich and rare flowers. As the fresh morning wind or the soft evening breeze fan those radiant tresses, and stir those green garments, and she regards you with that gracious, dazzling, bewitching smile, she is indeed beautiful and much to be desired ; you are caught in the sweet toils of the soothing and alluring odours, and the rare intoxicating scents ; you throw your arms aloft in surrender. You are captivated, you are enthralled, you are in the abandonment of submission as you lay your head upon that ample breast. You find rest for the weary body and comfort for the troubled soul. You come like others before you, you look and you linger, the spell is cast upon you, and you stay, for you find rest and peace and gladness in the desert. You may also see the wondrous lights in the clouds, and in those splendid skies, and dream of the greater lights and their untold glories beyond. You will also hear those many voices, the pleasant voices, the sweet and gracious voices, and to you may even be revealed something of the greater, the tremendous, the magnificent voices, and the voices of grand and glorious harmony from the infinite spaces that hold the radiant stars!

And when you are old and worn and very tired, you will sink peacefully to rest upon that sheltering bosom, and the warm kindly earth will receive and decently cover your bones. You will need no tomb or headstone to proclaim who you were, or what you were not. You may still live in the memory of your children, or of kind friends, for a kind act will be remembered longer than an epitaph, and a good or a noble thought is worth more than all tombstones, for it may survive through the ages!

And you may like to think of the untrammelled soul that is glad to be free from the poor, worn, earth-bound body, wafting its way to the spaces that hold the resplendent stars, where dwell those beautiful voices and the great and glorious lights. Or you may wish to think of it winging its flight into the midst of the radiant throng, back into the presence of the Mighty Maker, the Great Author and Giver of all, the Father of Light and of Harmony.

Across the smaller spaces of the years that yet make up a life comes the precious memory of a good mother, who cared for us and toiled hard for our welfare. And with it comes also the glad remembrance of a simple hymn, that, as a lisping child, I was taught at her knee. It was at the old homestead—I see and recall the very room and its furniture—in that far-off Karroo, the land of drought and rain, of sadness and great joys. That kind mother died when I was yet a child, and the loss was irreparable. It is a hymn for the young; but it is good for the old, it suits all ages, and it harmonizes with all religions. It has long been forgotten with so many of the sweet hymns and best songs of the dear olden days. It is beautiful, and it is sung to the tune of the first verse in the immortal "Auld Lang Syne." Reverently and in grateful memory of that dear mother, I commit the words to these pages:

God made the sky that looks so blue,
He made the grass so green,
He made the flowers that smell so sweet,
In pretty colours seen.

He made the sun that shines so bright
And gladdens all I see,
It comes to give us heat and light,
How thankful should we be!

He made the pretty bird to fly,
How sweetly has she sung;
And though she flies so very high,
She won't forget her young!

A hymn for all, that tells in simple language of the Great Creator and His works. The gate is wide, the field is vast, and the acres are broad. Come to this Africa of ours, all you who have hearts, all who are loyal and true to their manhood, all you who search after better things. Come and gaze into the sky that looks so blue; come and see the green grassy borderings and the golden mountain grasses; throw aloft your arms, and let the morning north-wind bathe you in the fragrance; come and behold the pretty-coloured flowers and inhale their sweetness in the cool evening breeze. Come into the brightness of this sun and bask in its warmth, its light and its gladness, and be thankful ! Come and look upon the graceful bush-dove and the beautiful hoopoe as they soar on high ; come and regard the radiant birds of many colours, and hearken to our Cape canary and the dear little reed sparrow, the birds that sing so sweetly and return to feed their young !

There is room for all. It is one great country, and there is one Great King over all. And as the night falls dark, and you raise your eyes to that splendid sky, as you regard the radiant planets and contemplate the mighty Milky Way, that "Shining River" of Heaven, the majestic womb of the spaces, with its countless, countless stars and inconceivable nebulæ, the stupendous matrix of myriad worlds unborn, then the responsive soul will bow in compelling worship, and the swelling heart will be lifted up in ecstasy of adoration to the Mighty Architect, the Great Jehovah, the God of the Hebrews—of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob ; the God of the Christian and of the Cross ; the God of the Gentiles and the outcast races of the earth ; the God of the poor benighted heathen that dare scarce lift their eyes to Heaven, for He is the Father of all ; the God of the ages, the unchanging and unchangeable God of the eternal and the infinite ; the King of Glory, the Lord and Giver of Life, the Father of Light and of Harmony, for He is very gracious, and His mercy endureth FOR EVER !

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The Old Homestead on the Karroo Farm.

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CHAPTER I

FARMING

Part I

THE OLD HOMESTEAD

MY earliest recollections of the Karroo Farm carry me back into the year 1863. The homestead buildings were even then considerable. There was also a set of well-planned kraals for the sheep and the goats, besides one for the mules and horses. At first we did not keep milch cows, as the veld was not quite suitable. Ostriches were not yet domesticated, though large numbers of the great birds roamed about the "flats" (the plains) over the main extent of the Great Karroo. Wire fencing was not known. For our kraals and other enclosures we mostly used stone that we quarried ourselves. But the yards and flower garden attached to the dwelling were surrounded by wooden palings, supported by parapets and solid pillars, built of burnt brick on foundations of stone. For large gardens, lands, or camps, the mimosa thorn-branches were in great request. But these had to be renewed from time to time, as the branches rotted and decayed.

At many farms, where there were no trees, and where suitable stone was not to be had, the kraals were constructed of sheep's dung, cut out in square cakes by means of a sharp spade, and cleverly and compactly stacked to form the walls. The cakes of dung were taken from a spot where the sheep had lain and slept for many years, and when dried, they were also the only fuel available, and served excellently for the purpose.

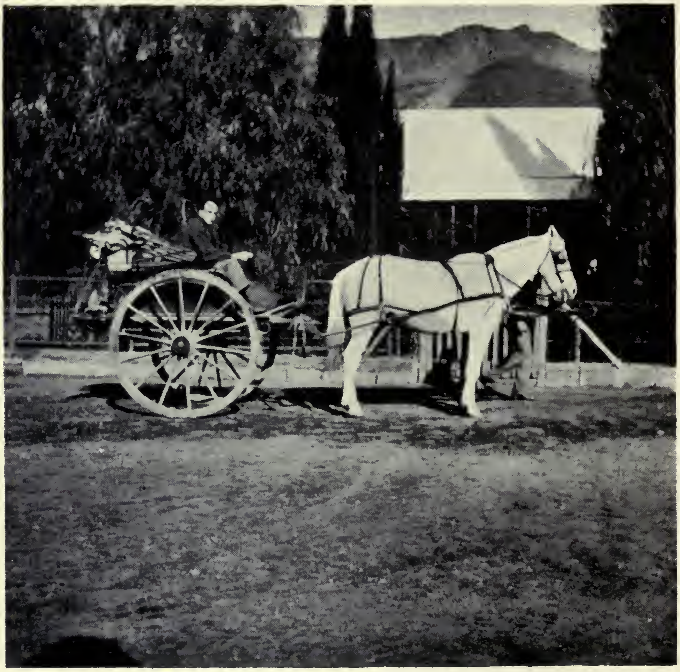
The principal rooms in our house were well boarded and ceiled. The remaining rooms had clay floors, which were smeared with sheep's dung in a half liquid state, and then allowed to dry. Nearly all the other farm-houses in those days had only such floors. The dung coating was regularly renewed once or twice a month. The springbok skin mats in these rooms were very useful and comfortable, and the strong, coarse calico that was tacked to the beams overhead made a neat and serviceable ceiling. If reeds were obtainable, they were often used instead of ceiling boards, and were overlaid with a thick plastering of clay. This made a cool covering in summer, and was also warmer in the winter time. Most of our outbuildings were not ceiled. Many farm dwellings had open lofts, either for want of the necessary material, or for the economy of dispensing with luxuries.

Over all, the buildings were roofed in with a well laid straw thatch, supported by strong wooden rafters. These roofs were impervious to heat, cold or wet, and they were excellent. The more convenient, though less comfortable, corrugated iron was not yet much in use owing to its comparative expense, and guttering was unknown. When it rained, the water ran off the eaves and sank into the earth, or flowed away. But we built good houses, with ample stone foundations, and with well-burnt bricks. For ventilation the rooms were provided with fair-sized windows, with small glass panes in frames that swung on plain hinges. For greater security the windows were furnished with hinged shutters that opened outwards, and were bolted at night, and opened again in the morning early. They made the premises safe during the dark hours, and were an effective protection to the glass frames against the hailstorms.

A very convenient contrivance was the main entrance door, which had an upper and a lower half, each on its own hinges. The "lower door" was generally closed of a day for privacy, and to keep out the dogs, fowls, or snakes. The "upper door" was left open, or was shut, as might be desirable—open for coolness and ventilation, or closed against the heat, the cold, or the rain. The large room to which this door gave access was the dining-room, and it had two windows.

We had excellent "Stinkwood" furniture, that was made on the farm by a Dutchman named Stol, who was a genius in that line, and clever in many other ways. A good many of his articles are still in use after more than sixty years. We had a better extension-table than is generally to be had at this day—large, strong, beautifully polished, with substantial and well-turned legs, and so contrived, that with a gentle push to the centre from the opposite ends, the leaves folded over and under one another, and a small, square, compact piece of furniture, suitable for a tea or a whist table—for the more enlightened Karroo farmers played whist in those days—stood in its place. We had well-made, polished chairs, with comfortable backs, strong cane seats and good sound legs, and they were made to last indefinitely. Such things and many others were the work of this remarkable man. It must be remembered that his appliances and choice of materials were limited. He also made us fishing-nets of common string, and he smoked and cured the fish that were caught in the river-pool, and they were wholesome eating, good and tasty.

We had iron and brass bedsteads, and cots that were imported. They were strong and comfortable, and the children could not fall out of the cots. Our baby perambulator was better than any I have seen since. It was almost impossible to upset it. Many babies have been killed, and thousands have been crippled for life, through some of the monstrous contrivances that have been in use later. Old-fashioned pictures, but works of merit, hung on the walls of the rooms. Tall, graceful, heavy, brass candlesticks — the Dutch "Kandelaar" — with elegant trays to hold the snuffers and the extinguishers stood upon the side tables. We did not have sperm candles. Ours were home-made, of tallow, and had cotton-twisted wicks that required to be frequently *snuffed;* for, on account of their thickness, the wicks were not consumed in the burning. The lights were *extinguished* without leaving the unpleasant odour of smouldering cotton. A well and neatly designed brass lamp, with a



Nel'spoort House. Cape Buggy with Crinoline Tent.

porcelain bowl, a glass chimney, and a large, frosted glass globe, was placed on the table-centre in the drawing-room.

Our churn made wonderful, snow-white butter, of the rich goat's milk. Our hand-mill ground the coffee that was roasted in a flat iron pot, being stirred the while with a hard wooden board. And our coffee, with the boiled goat's milk, was very good. I can truly say that I have never tasted better in the world. Our tea came from the Zwart Bergen of the Little Karroo, and was both wholesome and healthful, though the taste had to be acquired. For ten years I drank no other, and it is still largely consumed in the Cape. It is indigenous, and was not cultivated then. I do not know if it has been artificially grown since. Our tobacco was raised in the Oudtshoorn district, and the best of it made fair smoking for the pipe. Cigarettes were then unknown, and cigars were seldom seen. But that did not trouble me, for I was never a smoker. Nearly all the blacks and coloured people and a few inferior whites were addicted to chewing. Snuff was also made of the weed, and a lot of tobacco was used in " hand-dressing " the sheep, so as to check the scab. The " dipping " process came in some years later.

PART II

TRANSPORT

TRANSPORT was a difficult and arduous problem, and in time of drought it became a serious matter. There were no railways. We were thirty miles from the Dorp, which was itself 330 miles away from our chief port, Table Bay. The road to the Dorp was a mere track, on which a cart was easily upset, and which was dangerous travelling in the dark. For traction purposes, the large, heavy, bullock-wagons were used. They had no springs, and they were drawn by teams of oxen. Ten animals composed a small team, while sixteen were a large or full team. The number was regulated according to the size and strength of the cattle, and by such considerations as the weight of the load, the distance that had to be traversed, and the nature and condition of the road. Teams of mules running to ten animals were likewise used on the main roads. These were harnessed to the mule-wagons, which were of a lighter build. As a general rule, the mules were for the quicker and lighter transport, and the oxen for the slower and heavier.

In time of drought this traffic was sometimes greatly reduced or even suspended, and a scarcity of commodities ensued. We have been without sugar for months. "Boer meal" mounted up to £5 per bag of 200 lb., and was sometimes unobtainable. We have had to bake bread entirely of mealie meal; but many unfortunate farmers had no mealies, and were also forced to do without bread. The position has been known to become so serious that Government has been compelled to organize mule-wagon transport, and furnish forage at the then naturally high prevailing prices for the road. The herbage, by the way, was much too scant to support the animals. At such times we have had to do without many items that were not vital, and have had to be satisfied to obtain those that were indispensable. In one of these droughts I remember a serious scarcity of salt arising, although it was a natural product, and there was plenty in the country.

It must be borne in mind that after a long, rainless spell, when the sheep died of poverty, those who had no bread had also no meat fit to eat, and were faced with starvation. The herds of springbok were a source of relief. These remarkable antelopes had great drought-resisting capacity, and were generally in better condition when the veld was dry, for the reason that they were not continually running after the green, young growth, to be had in the good seasons, but which was unobtainable when the rains held aloof. They were obliged to take of the substance that was at hand, instead of running themselves to leanness after the shadow that had no stability. When things went hard, the timely addition of a springbok or two to the depleted larder was a great help. There was a variety of other game in the veld, but none so plentiful, or so much in evidence on the plains as the ubiquitous springbok. He was visible in one direction or another, or could be easily found.

As I have indicated, ours was a sheep farm; but, as necessary adjuncts, we kept a number of horses and mules, some oxen, and many goats. The horses, mules and oxen were for utility purposes, and, in the same connection, we had a number of vehicles and implements. First was a 14-foot bullock-wagon—the smaller size, next, a

"Scotch cart" without springs, and having an open, or uncovered body, that could be unhinged in front and tilted backwards automatically to unload the contents—a most handy contrivance when carting earth, stones, sand, manure, or other rough materials. Then there was a large tented "Cape cart" on springs, to carry four adults, as well as a lot of luggage, and there was also a light spring buggy for two persons, and which we used for journeys to the outstations, to outlying parts of the veld, where the herds were located with their flocks, or for other rough driving. We also had strong ploughs and harrows, primitive, but good.

The goats climbed mountains difficult of access to the sheep and reached the mimosa by standing on their hind legs and resting their forefeet against the boughs, which the sheep did not do. They also thrived on herbage that was unsuitable for sheep, and were thus adapted to the economies of Karroo farming. The goat-ewes gave us milk and butter: we sold the "Kapaters"—the *wether goats* to the butchers as supplementary mutton, and got good value for the skins of the ewes that we slaughtered. In minor ways, too, these animals were serviceable, as you will find if you read on.

PART III

WOOLLED SHEEP—SHEARING

THE Merino sheep, or more correctly—the *woolled* sheep, was, however, the mainstay, and the object upon which effort and activity centred. We will now speak of him, and the things that appertain to him. He was the great source of profit, and if we had a thousand goats, we had proportionately eight to ten thousand sheep. There was the annual fleece of wool, which in those days averaged a value of 3*s*. During the Great War the price mounted to 12*s*., and has even doubled this figure since! For the animals that we sold to the Port Elizabethan butchers, we received 10*s*. to 13*s*. a head, according to the size and condition of the sheep, and the ruling prices. Labour was cheap, but commodities were dear, owing mainly to high freights and expensive transport, and also to the interminable periods of delay before consignments could be delivered. The running costs, taken in conjunction with the resulting profits of those times, would not, therefore, and for other reasons, compare favourably with the later pre-war days.

There were two shearing-kraals—the shearing-house with portable wooden floor in sections, the adjoining wool-room with boarded floor, and next to it, the stone-floored room (that was otherwise the smithy or general workshop) where the wool was baled. To one shearing-kraal was brought from the flock grazing a mile away a lot of 200 sheep. There were eight to ten shearers, mostly kaffirs, stripped to the waist or wearing only a loin-cloth, ranged along the length and across the width of the large room. Each was provided with a pair of strong steel shears acting on a spring, so that in the process of clipping they were closed by the pressure of the hand and opened again automatically when that pressure was relaxed. The shearer caught his sheep in kraal number one, took it through the communicating door to his located post, clipped the fleece from the neck and left shoulder, passing round the back, then stripped the belly and finished off at the lower part of the back, down to the tail, also cutting away the skirtings and the fringes along the legs. Then he passed the sheep, through the opposite communicating door, to kraal number two, returned and gathered up the fleece, and handed it over the "lower door" that opened into the wool-room—the "upper door" having been removed (or folded back against the wall, as it was contrived in two leaves) for the occasion of shearing—to the white man in charge, from whom he received a check ticket, and he then went back for another sheep. The fleece was stacked on the near side of the "sorting-table," where another white hand was stationed. This second white hand sorted the wool, throwing open the fleeces on the table, the top of which was constructed of round wooden bars with narrow spaces between for the detached pieces of wool, known as "locks," to drop through on to the boarded floor beneath. He divided the fleece into "long wool" from the back and the upper sides; "skirtings" from the lower sides and legs, and "bellies." These divisions were gathered up separately and dropped into their respective bales. The "locks" were dealt with apart, being swept together from time to time, and put into another bale; and in the same way were dealt with the pieces that fell through the spaces between the shearing-floor boards into the cavity below, sections of the floor being taken up when convenient, or after the shearing was over. But with these pieces were mixed much dust and dung from the sheep and from the shearer's feet, and before baling with the "locks" from the wool-room they were cleaned over the wire-grating sieve, that was also used for separating the burnt lime from the rubble, and that served equally well for the double purpose.

The bales were hung by their four upper corners to the beams of the open loft in the stone-floored room, and were drawn up taut, so that they barely touched the floor below. One or two hands, usually kaffirs or Cape boys, were engaged in "treading" or "tramping" the wool. They stood inside the bales and trod or tramped down tightly with their weight and strength the wool that was cast in. A good tramper got in more wool to the bale than a poor one, and economised time and material. Fewer bales required less handling, and saved labour and outlay. A full bale weighed from 400 to 600 lb. The variation in weight was accounted for, as to 100 lb. upwards, by the class of wool. The long wool was the lightest, the shorter skirtings and bellies were heavier, and the locks, which lay closest, were much the heaviest. Another 100 lb. possibly represented the difference in efficiency between a good and an indifferent tramper. For handling these heavy bales conveniently shaped and adaptable iron "wool-hooks" were provided. These enabled a good grip to be obtained, and gave additional leverage.

A good shearer clipped a hundred sheep in a day, an inferior one only sixty. Ten hands might have averaged eighty-five. The pay was 5*s.* per hundred head, with rations and sleeping quarters provided; but the shears were charged for. Now, the rates have advanced to 12*s.* per hundred, the boys finding themselves in food, and also furnishing their own shears. During the busy scene, and the lively snipping sounds of the shears, the workers in turn beguiled the monotony of their labour by recounting experiences of spinning yarns, which were punctuated with many an "ehwe!" (*Yes!*) by the eager and sympathetic listeners, or they chanted weird but not unpleasing melodies, to the burden of which one and all responded heartily.

To the Sturdy Shearers

Work, shearers, work! for the glad bright day now passeth,
And soon all work is done;
Speak, shearers, speak! for the voiceless death approacheth,
And soon all speech is dumb;
Talk, shearers, talk! for the silent grave awaiteth,
And soon all talk is o'er;
Sing, shearers, sing! for the hush of night now falleth,
And soon ye sing no more!
Work, speak, talk, sing! You'll soon be done, you'll soon be dumb,
And soon your last have sung!

Part IV

SHEPHERDS

The shepherds received first 5*s.* and later 10*s.* per month (now the pay is 15*s.* to 20*s.* per month) with ration allowances as follows:—

Four old ewes a month if the family was large, but only three if it was a small family ; four " buckets "—25 lb. of " Boer meal " per bucket—and a piece of untanned ox-hide (for making shoes) during the same period, also some tobacco, which they smoked and chewed, and a measure of salt. Our herds then were mostly Hottentots, but some had an infusion of white blood in their veins.

The stock was divided into flocks of 1,200 to 1,400. We had six flocks as a rule, making with the goats and the rams about 9,000 head. The extent of the farm was nearly 50,000 morgen—more than 100,000 acres. The sheep were counted once a month. If any were missing, a good herd gave account of them. A bad one did not, and a better man was put in his place. A clever one made a fictitious and plausible statement. We had one of these who could write and count, quite extraordinary accomplishments for any of his class in those days. At each count, one or two of his flock were missing. He told his story ; but he *knew*, and we did not. He was a smart fellow, and though we suspected, he stayed on for years. After all, his service was more profitable than that of inefficient honesty ! Years later he went to the Dorp, where he worked for a Dutch family. When most wanted he was missed, and after a search was discovered kneeling and praying aloud in the middle of the garden path, where the God-fearing folk were loath to disturb him. Meanwhile the hens' eggs were disappearing. He disclaimed all knowledge till at last a lot were found concealed in his bedding. He was a rare and clever rascal.

We had four good herds who remained with us for many years. They were brothers, and much alike in features ; but they differed remarkably in stature. In blood they were 'twixt the Cape boy and the Hottentot. Their names were Jan, Philip, Jacob and Kiviedau, and their surname was Hammond. Among the quaint names of the men were : Plaaitje (rascal), Olifant (elephant), Rhebok (a mountain buck), January, April, September, Sole, Spijker (a metal nail), Haakbeen (bow-legged), Bokwa (buck-wagon), Gentle, Hollander, Taaibosch (tough bush), Wildeman (wild man), and of the women, Luis (louse) and Vlooi (flea).

Besides the sheep and the regular run of goats, we had the " milk goats " at the homestead. The herd of these also milked them ; but he was assisted in the kidding time. Then there was the flock of sheep rams, about 150, that were herded on the home veld. One of the ram herds, a kaffir, was with us for a long time. He dressed neatly, could read and write a little, and always carried his Bible. His name was "Stuurman "—(*Sending man* or *errand boy*—and he was a good honest fellow. He drew 10*s.* per month, and got his rations at the house, as he had no wife. The rams were valuable, and, later, it was arranged that he should receive 20*s.*—double pay—at the end of each month that the count of his flock proved it intact. This answered well, and regularly he drew his sovereign. But one evening, after getting his money, he came back to say that he had only been paid a ten-shilling piece. He was dismissed with the assurance that it was all right ;

but he returned again. Once more he was told that there was nothing wrong, and was again sent off; but he put in a third appearance! To convince him, my father fetched a half-sovereign, laid it in his palm beside the larger coin, and gave him the choice. That settled it! He was not uneasy about his money afterwards. The strange part was, that he had drawn his sovereign for months, and he was fairly intelligent. He must have feared that he had been paid half-sovereigns all the time, and was being *done*; that the improvement in his finances was too good to be true!

The shepherds built their own huts, of a light and rounded framework of poles and laths, which were thickly and securely covered and thatched with the "milk-bush," and generally plastered well on the outer side with mud. A small space was left for entrance and exit.

There were bad men among these herds. What was there to make them better? But the majority, as I remember them, were good, and many were devoted, which was vastly to their credit. It was commonly and conveniently urged that these people were used to their lives and knew of nothing better—an unconscious, though the most powerful plea possible, for their amelioration! In 1894, a young cousin of our family was so impressed with their forlorn state, the lonely deaths, the rude and summary burial, and the absence of aid in the hour of trouble—that he shortly threw up farming, qualified as a missionary, and went to labour amongst the blacks.

In the Beaufort West Division alone in 1885, during a bitterly cold rain that lasted for two days and nights, a score of shepherds perished by their flocks!

The Solitary Shepherds

You lonely shepherds of the great and lonely wild,
What wot ye of the white man, his knowledge and his pride?
You humble black men who in Nature's Book confide,
And oft know more than white men, of truths that will abide!

You faithful shepherds, who in bitter storms were tried,
What cared ye for the home man, that snugly did reside—
You patient plain men? For your duty was your guide,
You perished nobly, and Death at Duty's call defied!

You simple shepherds of the solitary wide,
What reck ye of the townsman, his comforts undenied—
You guileless veldmen? For you knew that when you died,
A mound of earth and brown stones hid all there was to hide!

Part V

SHEEP-WASHING, DRESSING AND DIPPING

A GREAT occasion was the sheep-washing. This was a month before the shearing. Mid to end September was the average time, when the warm spring weather had set in. A wide space was excavated in the further side of the river bank, parallel to the long water-pool. On this space, stout, wooden stakes were driven into the ground. Long light poles were lashed crosswise to these stakes, and thus a kraal was made, through and over which the river floods flowed without carrying it away. Into the kraal the sheep were driven. Eight boys stood waist-deep in the water, forming a chain across the pool. Two more caught the sheep and passed them, one at a time, to the nearest hand, who gave the animal a few vigorous rubs as it floated, and passed it on to his neighbour, who repeated the rubbing, and in his turn passed on the sheep to the next man, and so the animal travelled along the line of scourers. The last of these, stationed near the homestead shore of the pool, rubbed the sheep briskly, and finally, and released it to join the scoured flock on the near side of the river. The washing lasted about ten days, when all the flocks were dealt with. It polluted the water, and many fish perished. It was abandoned later because it did not repay the trouble and expense, nor compensate for the worry to the sheep. For a time, some farmers had their wool scoured by the wool-washing mills; but this also did not pay for the trouble and delay. So they sold their produce as "grease wool," unwashed and with the *grease* or oil in it, and such is the practice of the Karroo farmers to-day.

And now we come to another time of bustle. This was the occasion of the "dipping." Till 1868 the process was unknown in the Karroo. We had practised the primitive method of "hand-dressing," which was laborious and unsatisfactory. It checked the scab, gave some relief to the sheep, and saved much wool; but it did not cure. Tobacco was the only practical antidote in those days, and it was quite good. In hand-dressing, a quantity of the cut-up weed was placed in a tank, or large iron pot, water was added, and it was boiled over a strong fire. The mess was stirred, so as to prepare a powerful decoction. Next to the vessel, and in the same kraal, a sloping platform was erected, so that the water that might flow down it would pass into a shute and run into the neighbouring vessel. The infected sheep were caught, and laid one or two at a time on the platform. The decoction was dipped out with a jug, and poured on the scabby patches, being smartly rubbed in by the hand. It is obvious that there were scabby sheep that were not visibly infected ; also that parts of the animals that were handled escaped the necessary dressing. The disease is caused by a minute insect, mostly invisible to the naked eye. It is therefore plain, that although the decoction destroyed the insects, countless numbers escaped, and the method was hopelessly imperfect, and lacked thoroughness. A better way was imperative, and the difficulty was solved by the process of " dipping," in which all the infected flock was *submerged* in the tobacco fluid.

My father was the first in the Karroo to plan and erect a set of dipping-kraals, dipping-pit and tanks, and his model was copied by other farmers who realized the necessity of keeping their sheep clean. Many, however, resisted all innovations. Conservatism was strong, and ignorance was deplorable, and it is only of late years that it has been possible to legislate severely enough to cope successfully with the destructive disease. It was not alone the tremendous loss of wool that was entailed ; but the deterioration in quality was also disastrous. And the sheep suffered, with the attendant, maddening and irritative itching, and were reduced to leanness. What could have been expected under such circumstances, when it is obvious that only the best conditions yield the best results? The losses in Australia, traceable directly to scab, amounted to many millions sterling before the trouble was effectively dealt with there. But though they began to farm a hundred years after us, they soon led the way, and they still lead.

As to our dipping contrivances: first, there were the kraals. The flock was driven into the large kraal. Through the communicating way, as many sheep as conveniently possible were again driven into a long narrow kraal. From this again a number were driven into a smaller kraal, parallel with, and alongside of the dipping-pit, on to which it opened, there being no barrier or dividing wall between it and the length of the pit. The pit itself was an excavation in the natural limestone bed, and was 5½ feet deep, 3 feet wide and 12 feet long. The floor and sides were paved with stone, pointed with lime, and plastered with cement. At the further end, and from a height of 2½ feet above the floor level, an upward slanting passage, flanked by stone walls, communicated with two upward sloping, stone-floored draining kraals. The pit was filled to a depth of 4½ feet with "tobacco-water," which was kept at a temperature of 110 to 120 degrees Fahrenheit. The sheep, as many as the pit would conveniently hold, were dropped in, and were kept there for two minutes. Any dry heads were promptly pushed under the water by the man with the specially contrived "dipping-hook," who stood at the ready with his implement. The "dropgate" to the communicating passage was then raised by means of the attached chain, and the sheep swam out, and waded up the slope into the draining kraal on the right, the water from the dripping sheep running down the sloping floor of the kraal and the passage, back into the pit. The man with the adaptable hook guided the sheep from the pit to the passage, pulling up those that occasionally went under and were in danger of drowning.

The two draining-kraals had a central parting wall, that abutted on the open and upper end of the passage. On the abutting end of this wall hung a swing gate, that now barred the opening into the left draining-kraal. When the right draining-kraal would hold no more sheep, the swing gate was unhooked from the left draining-kraal entrance, and swung across the entrance of the right draining-kraal and fastened. The sheep now passed into the left kraal, and when this was full, the further and upper gate of the right kraal was opened, and the sheep, now thoroughly drained, were driven out to the veld. The swing gate was again unhooked, and in turn swung across the opening into the left kraal and closed, thus again giving access from the pit to the right kraal. I have said that the water in the pit was maintained at a certain temperature. A square iron tank of 600-gallon capacity was erected on the far side of the pit, opposite to the small kraal from which the sheep were dropped in, and was charged with 400 to 500 gallons of water that was kept at boiling point by the furnace beneath it. A pipe conducted the steam from the tank to the bottom of the pit, and maintained the temperature of the "tobacco-water"; but if the heat became too great, the steam was shut off, and given another vent through the safety-cock of the tank, which was then opened for the purpose. To supply and replenish the contents of the pit, another 600-gallon tank, with its furnace, was erected at the rear of the pit. This tank contained boiling "tobacco-water," and when required, its contents were tapped off into a supplementary cement tank, that was built between the two iron tanks. The contents of this cement tank, after cooling, were run off into the pit when the latter required to be replenished. Near at hand stood the windmill, which pumped water from the river-pool, and the stream was diverted by shutes into the tanks when wanted.

Such were our dipping arrangements and contrivances half a century ago. They have admitted of little improvement since, for they were good and well planned.

In the strenuous labour of seizing and dropping in the sheep, an unlucky operator was sometimes precipitated into the pit. There was hearty laughter and loud cheering, and the man with the hook was called upon to duck the flounderer's head, so that the work might be well done! The victim had no option but to join in the general merriment.

To the Dapper Dippers!

In the toiling and the moiling
As they drip and sweat,
In the tumbling and the stumbling
As they trip all wet,
In the reek of the foul fetid odour,
In the seep of the strong tepid water.

Duck his head, dip him down,
From the heel to the crown,
Kill the scab, make a cure,
Have it safe, make it sure—
In a wish, in a wash, in a dash,
With a splish, with a splosh, with a splash!

We will skip, we will tip, we will dip,
And laughter of the day we will borrow;
We shall slip, we shall trip, we shall drip,
Avast there! and belay bootless sorrow!
We will rip, we will grip, we will strip,
Disaster to allay 'gainst the morrow:

We will nip, we will quip, we will hip—
Hurrah there! for the play we will roar Oh!
We will whip, we will flip, never jib,
The faster goes the fray and the more so;
We will clip, we will sip, smack the lip,
And quaff here and be gay and galore so!

Never borrow bootless sorrow 'gainst the morrow,
We will roar Oh! all the more so and galore so!

Part VI

THE LAMBING

The most important period of the sheep farming operations was the lambing season. It started at the beginning of March, and terminated at the end of July. It was always a worrying time, and often attended by difficulty and much anxiety. I have known a season of drought, when the veld was poor and the ewes were lean, and we had to cut the throats of all the new-born lambs, to the number of 3,000, or otherwise we would have lost the ewes as well. It was appalling. Nothing ever set me so much against farming as that dreadful year of 1877, when we eventually lost two-thirds of the small stock, besides many head of cattle. It was not alone the material loss; but the pitiful sufferings of the poor dumb animals as they perished in hundreds of hunger and thirst, for the water became contaminated and unfit to drink. But above all, the butchery of those thousands of innocent lambs was horrible beyond words. Days, weeks, months, the bloody work went on, while the blazing sun beat down from a sky of brass, and all nature groaned and laboured in distress. Delicate little birds lingered near the house, and hovered around the carrion in search of little flies, for the more tender insects had also disappeared. In the end the greater number of our small, useful, feathered friends likewise perished in the prevailing want. Those were evil times that one would fain forget.

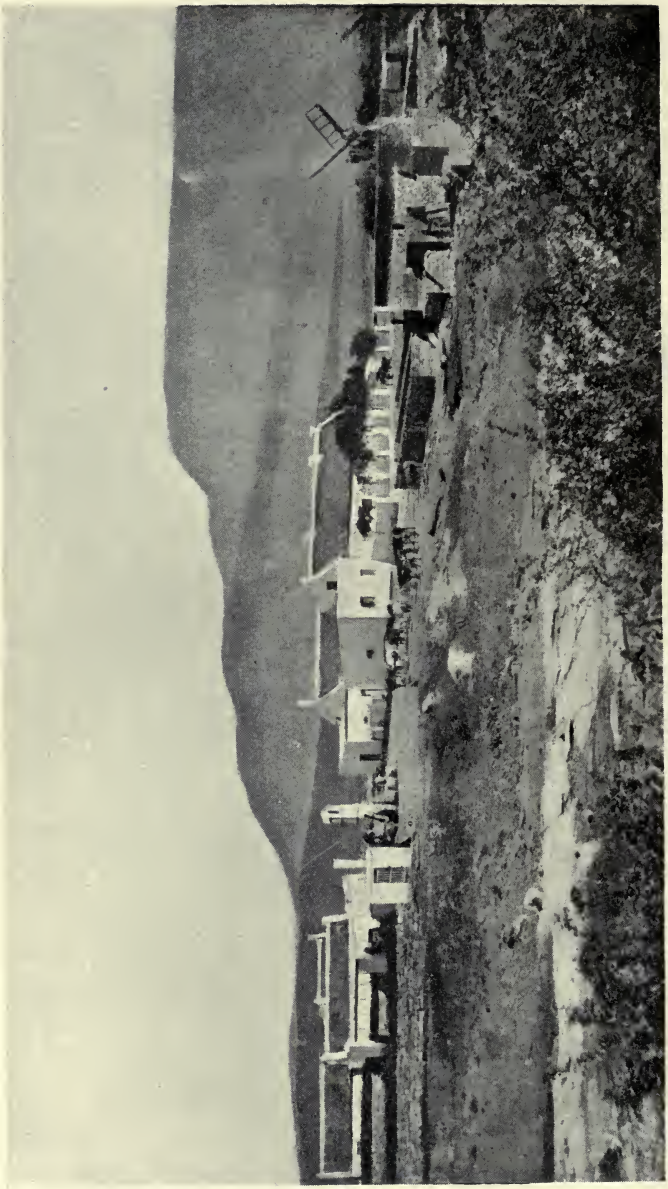
There were better days ahead; but 1878 was also a poor year, with little rain, and few lambs were reared. It was likewise an exceedingly hard time, and it was not till 1879 that the rains really returned. And then it was well on in March, and they were ushered in by a cold South-Easter that carried off more than 250 lambs. We were also filled with anxiety because of the low condition of the ewes, and not knowing what lay ahead. We had not the facilities of to-day, with its wire camps and paddocks, and quick and easy communication by rail and motor, and the hardships we had to cope with were great. There were few watering-places, and there was incessant running to and fro to water, and to kraal some eight several lots of ewes with their lambs, to take them to the veld, and to keep them apart. They grazed at distances ranging from a few hundred yards, to a mile away, in various directions. No herds were provided; they were driven off in the morning, taken to water in the late afternoon, and then back to the kraal. Each lot was dealt with separately, and was kraaled apart. It was imperative to keep the lots from mixing. You could not conveniently shift young lambs of varying strength together, though there was but a few days between their ages, and the different lots were graded according to their ages and strength. If you allowed them to mix and tried to drive them, the stronger ones would draw away ahead, and the whole flock would straggle and become scattered in spite of your efforts. To kraal them, which was always difficult, would now be impossible. The stronger would go in first, and as you toiled to get in the weaklings, the former would come back, and the ewes would follow. The gateway would be blocked, and if you tried to stay the reactionary torrent, the lambs were liable to be trampled to death. I well remember that, in the same year of 1879, after I had struggled alone for an hour to kraal a large lot of ewes and lambs, and had at last succeeded, I picked up a fine big lamb in the gateway with the life trodden out of it. I have no doubt a few more were hurt. It is sometimes so hard to get a lot of ewes and young lambs into a kraal without assistance, that it is advisable to avoid the attempt, if it is possible to get help.

When the cold soaking rains came along, it was dreadful. They did not occur often, or the work would have been impossible, and life not worth living under the conditions in which we were placed. If the lambs were coming into the world at the rate of 200 a day and upwards, as it happened in that season, and they became numbed by the cold wind blowing on their wet bodies, we went round with sacks and collected them. When one had gathered eight to a dozen, he shouldered the sack and took it to the house.

My brother and I were posted at the far outstation that year. Our tenement was a single, large, stone-walled room, the thatched roof of which had partly disappeared, and the rain poured through. We avoided the wet as far as possible by keeping on the leeside of the walls. The mud floor was entirely gone, but for a daïs at one end, where a little thatch showed overhead ; but even there our bed got wet. The greater part of what should have been the floor had become a corresponding depression, in which a large pool of water gathered. We put down stones, and laid boards across them so as to get access from the bed to the fireplace at the opposite end of the room, and we arranged another row of boards across the apartment to the door. There was nothing humorous about it. It was utterly absurd ; it was also downright serious. Anyway we laid down those sacks of lambs, just as they were, close to the walls to avoid the water, took another sack, and went back for more, till we had 150 lambs in that room. To add to our difficulty, there was a tremendous flow of water between us and the lambing sheep, for it had been raining hard for very many hours. We staggered through the stream, waist-deep, and it was at times difficult to retain a footing. The while we scarcely had a bite, as there was no time. We had no fire, because the "figbush" that we collected when we wished to "light up" was soaked. It was possible to kindle a fire ; but it would have required a little time and effort, and the perishing lambs demanded our full attention. Lambs in sacks ! Why put them in sacks to die ? Let me tell you that it was the only practical method of preserving them alive. There lay the sack of cold inanimate forms, in the rigidity of apparent death. In half an hour, warm vapour was arising, like steam, from that sack, which, in another half-hour, began to stir, as if alive. A little later, it became agitated by the struggles of the inmates to find an egress. You took them out, and found them alive and well. One or two had been too far gone, or did not have the vitality of the others. They were dead. Occasionally one was smothered by the others lying over it. But if you had taken those same lambs when they were cold and rigid, and had laid them by the fire, you would have lost nearly every one. Only the hardiest might have survived. The reaction would have been too sudden and too great, and it would have killed them.

Now we also had to keep an eye on the separate lots of ewes and lambs, of graded days and strength, and these rescued lambs had to be provided for as well. The mother ewes would not, or could not receive them back, for the scent or smell, by which alone they knew them, had become vitiated by the wet, and their close contact with each other. It was also humanly impossible to tell which lamb belonged to which ewe. That evening, a ewe that had no lamb, was caught, and was tied by a looped " strop " —" *strap* "—to a wooden post, that had been planted for the purpose against the wall of the kraal on the outside ; or, if there was no post available, the strop was looped through a chink in the stone wall. The other end of the strop was looped round the sheep's foreleg. Then a motherless lamb was put with her, and she was held quietly while he took a drink. Some ewes adopted their charges quickly. With others it was a matter of days, and sometimes of weeks. The more isolated their surroundings, the better did the plan work. Therefore, as far as it was possible, each ewe was tied up at a spot where she was out of sight of any other tied sheep, and so had only the lamb for company. In her solitude she appreciated the little one's society, and called him back if he strayed a few feet away. These ewes and lambs were called the " Vastmaaks " —*fast makes*—and the same evening (or next morning at latest) that a ewe was tied and a lamb given to it, an identical tar number, or mark, was put on each of them, on a corresponding part of the body, on top of the head, neck, or on the back, always where the mark was readily seen. Thus each ewe and its lamb, being correspondingly marked with their particular number or mark, were identified the following evening, and the ewe was again tied in its place, and this process was continued until she had definitely accepted the lamb as though it were her own, and the tying-up ceased to be necessary.

The labour that all this entailed, and the discomfort in wet weather, when the dung floors of the kraals were soaked and slippery, with occasional pools of liquid filth, and through it all as you tediously searched out the ewe and its lamb, caught them, took them to their post, tied the ewe, and went back for another pair, and so struggled on for two hard hours, when you were already worn and wearied with incessant toil since break of day—I say what this denoted, I will leave to your imagination, for I can scarcely tell you. Looking back, it seems to have been about the limit of endurance, which it no doubt was. You labour men with your eight-hour days, your off days, and your annual holiday on full pay, and who are yet not satisfied, how would you like the experience? Mind! I do not commend it, for it was not good. At such times we missed our meals. Sometimes we had no bread, and were also without meat, because we could not make provision under the pressure. More help was necessary; but we did not have it. If no opportunity occurred from the homestead, ten miles away, to send us supplies, then one of us rode



The Old Dorp, 1868.

over, once a week if possible, to obtain them. A few loaves of bread, a little coffee, sugar, and a few other trifles if they were to be had, were all our requirements. For meat, we killed a sheep when there was time.

In that same rain that lasted all night, and all the next day, when so many lambs succumbed, we scarcely ate or drank. Late in the evening, after the rain, we managed to cook a pot of rice. Besides a little coffee, it was all we had. We threw off our drenched clothing that we had worn since dawn, and crawled into a wet bed. I had only one suit with me. I hung it over the "Upper Door" which opened inwards, having first wrung it out. It was still drizzling, and a heavy damp mist hung over the veld. At daylight next morning I got my clothes, and found them dripping. They were saturated with the additional moisture that they had absorbed during the night. I again wrung out the water and put them on. I had much running about to do, and by three o'clock in the afternoon, they had partially dried on me. At that hour I went and had my first meal, a portion of cold rice from that same pot in which it had been cooked the previous evening.

As I said, such things are not to be commended. They cannot be good. Their effect on mind and body must be harmful. That neither of us developed pneumonia is to be wondered at. We were fortunate. How we came to labour under such conditions, I can only reason out in this way. The outstation had not been previously occupied since 1875, and the house was already somewhat dilapidated at that time. The lambing of 1876 was conducted at the adjoining outstation three miles Westward, where there were good buildings. The last rain fell on the 22nd of November, 1876, and for the whole of 1877 the fall was less than an inch. The great drought held sway. There was no great improvement in 1878; but we managed to rear a few lambs. The losses before that had been ruinous. There were no high prices for produce to help us out. All but the most urgent outlays were stopped. The lambing of 1879 was to have been at the Western station, that was in good repair, and my brother and I were actually located there in view of the arrangement. But the rains held aloof, and it was already nearing the month of March. The ewes were lean, and the veld at the Eastern station was better. So we "trekked"—*moved on*—and took possession of that wreck of a habitation, that was not fit for horses, because it did not keep out the rain, which from then onwards became abnormal, and continued, at intervals, till late in June, making a total of many inches for the season. As for the rest, those were the primitive days, and we were accustomed to roughing it. We should have had an additional boy to attend to our personal wants; but as I have said, the most rigid economy was being practised. Nothing mattered but the sheep and the lambs. So it was regarded; but it was wrong. An additional hand would not have cost much, and by enabling us to attend more strenuously to our duties, as we should have been more fit, it would have been an economy.

PART VII

CUTTING, MARKING, ETC.—GOATS AND THE KIDDING

I HAVE tried to convey some idea of the shearing, sheep-washing—now obsolete—dipping, and lambing, as I knew it in the sheep farming of those bygone days in the Karroo. You may not think it; but I have tried to be brief. I am not attempting a book on farming, for there are other things to tell.

Yet there were many minor and important matters, and I shall give you an outline of a few. Preparatory to the lambing, was the sorting out of the ewes with large udders. These were put together in a separate flock, as being the first to have their lambs. About seven weeks after their advent, the lambs (with their mother ewes) were brought to the kraals to be cut and marked. The males had also to be castrated. Each lamb was caught and held, while a white man, who was expert at the work, did the rest with a sharp pocket-knife and the aid of his teeth. The tail was cut off 1½ inches from the body, and the owner's mark was cut (or punched by another instrument) in the ear. The lambs bled profusely; but they seldom died, unless the so-called expert was a bungler. The mutilation, as you may term it, is often condemned; but you cannot find a practical way to obviate it. The castration is imperative. The tail of a woolled sheep grows long, hangs limp, harbours filth, would make the fleece dirty, and spoil the wool. A tar mark instead of an ear mark, is a natural suggestion; but a tar mark requires renewal, besides the fact that it would be annually shorn away, and that it can be easily copied, or can be altered by placing another mark over it. What this may involve, you can easily see. I must add that each farmer had his own particular and recognized ear mark, and that it was highly necessary, for the sake of the animal itself, to avoid repeated or unnecessary handling and worry. In all these things the best conditions were studied, so as to arrive at the best results.

At the age of four to five months, came the time for weaning the lambs. This was the simplest of all the processes. The lambs were caught and put in a separate kraal. When they were all sorted out, the ewe mothers were driven off, and the lambs were placed with another flock, generally along with some wethers. This stage may suggest the question of the shearing of the lambs. It took place in March or April, before the cold weather set in, and the wool was sold as "lamb's wool." After the preliminary shearing, they were clipped annually in October with the grown sheep, generally skipping the year of their first shearing.

At sundry times there was the sorting out of wethers fit for the butcher. The likely-looking ones were caught, the feel of the tail, if it was fat, also denoting the satisfactory condition of the animal, and serving as an additional test. The selected ones were put in a kraal apart. If the butcher's buyer was present, you struck a bargain, and he took delivery of his sheep. If he was shortly expected, they were carefully herded against his arrival, There was the "catching out" of the old ewes, at the age of seven years, when the tip of one ear was cut off. They were marked "Stump-ear," and generally herded in a flock with goats and young wethers. Their period of usefulness was over. They were to have no more lambs. They were to be killed as meat for the household and the herds. The butchers would not give much for them. They were not fat and tender enough for the fastidious town dwellers, who liked a good chop, and preferred the best.

There were the goats, and the kidding of the goats. A kid does not run alongside its mother from the hour of its birth, as does a lamb. If it is born in the veld, the herd has to carry it home. I have seen a herd returning with his flock, carrying sixteen newborn kids slung over his shoulders. Young kids have not the intelligence of lambs. They are comparatively stupid, and give a great deal more trouble. Until they are about two months old, they are kept at the house, while the older ones go out, with the goat-ewes, to graze.

Many of the goat-ewes were retained at the homestead for their milk, after the kids were weaned. While their kids were still with them, they were separated from the little ones for the night, and milked dry in the morning, before the young ones rejoined them for the day. The stay-at-homes were put with their mothers for the night, after the latter had been milked, though all the milk was not taken from them. We thus ensured a supply of fresh milk both morning and evening.

The old goat-ewes we slaughtered for meat, and we sold the wethers—the "*kapaters*"—to the butchers.

We did not keep Angora goats ourselves in those days, so that there was no shearing of goats. Those that ran with flocks of sheep, were also dipped with the latter. They did not get the scab of the sheep; but being amongst them, they could easily harbour some of the minute insects, the destruction of which was necessary to avoid reinfection.

We always kept one or more pairs of leaders from among the largest of the "goat wethers"—the "*kapaters*." They were invaluable. We trained them ourselves. A couple were hustled forward, and taught to walk in front of a flock of sheep as they entered by the gate of the kraal, or went out of it. Goats were bold, and walked in readily; but sheep were timid, and held back. These goat leaders were indispensable, especially at the dipping, when the sheep were scared at sight of the pit and the noise of the steampipe. We generally had two couples at the farm. They did better in couples; for they gave each other confidence, and alone in a flock of sheep, they were also company for one another. They saved much time and a great deal of trouble.

PART VIII

HORSES, OXEN, ETC.

I HAVE endeavoured to point out how necessary the common goat—the "Boer goat" as we call him—was to the Karroo farm. But horses were also indispensable in those days, and even now it would be difficult to do without them. Though we have railways, motor-cars, and bicycles, a horse can go when some of these things are not available, and where none of them are able to go. Moreover, nearly all the farm hands ride horses ; but few can drive motors, and many cannot cycle. We usually kept about six horses, at least two for pulling a cart and four for the saddle (but two of which were also trained for drawing), and about four mares, most of which were trained to the saddle. The foals of the mares served to fill the blanks that occurred through death or other causes. For a long time we also had a pair of good mules. They could draw a heavy cart, or pull a plough.

Oxen were also required for transport, were it only within the borders of the farm, and a fully equipped and well-stocked Karroo *sheep farm* had all these additional animals. In the way of cattle, we had some eight oxen, six cows, and a bull. The oxen served to convey material and supplies to different parts of the farm, by means of the wagon mentioned on a previous page, and for taking products to the Dorp, and bringing return loads, when outside transport was not available. They were also useful for ploughing. When an ox grew old, he was allowed to fatten, not being worked for a year, and was killed in the winter, so that we had beef by way of a change from the monotonous daily round of mutton. Gaps in the team were filled by calves from the cows, as they grew up in their turn. Twice we tried to keep cows for their milk ; but the veld was not suitable, and we found that it took a cow enough of her time to support her calf. The skins of the cattle were used for "resoling" our "veld shoes" which were then in vogue, pieces of raw hide being stitched on to the tanned soles to reinforce them. It answered well, and our herds were also rationed with a pair of "raw-soles" each per month.

Pigs we also kept a few of, and we killed at least one each winter. It was quite an occasion, and much did we appreciate the additional fare of pork chops, sausages, boar's head, and hams.

Of poultry we had a considerable number and variety, including a few guinea-fowl, and highly necessary they were for their eggs, and to furnish the table with an occasional change in the meat diet. A small flock of pigeons also served to enliven and beautify the homestead. With now and then a haunch of Springbok venison, or something else in the way of game, and a catch of fish at intervals from the river-pool, as further additions to our bill of fare, we did not do so badly.

We generally had five for six dogs, of various or mixed breeds, and very useful they were, and good company on the lonely veld. Some were splendid animals, and my recollections of them are abiding and pleasant. A man cannot have a more faithful friend than a good and loyal dog.

I think this completes the general category of domestic animals on our farm. We also had a few cats, and sundry wild-animal pets. I give an account of several of these in later chapters.

Ostriches we did not keep in those days. Many farmers have tried that since to their sorrow. The feather industry is too subject to the caprice of fortune, that is in itself influenced by the eccentricities of fashion, and the vagaries of supply and demand. Sheep farming has throughout been more reliable, and, in spite of all its many drawbacks, has proved the more steadily remunerative.

Part IX

PERSONAL AND DOMESTIC

The last years of my life on the Karroo farm were clouded and sad. I would not care to live them over again. As I have said, the good seasons ended in 1876. The year following was a time of dread disease and drought. The carcasses of thousands of dead animals lay rotting over the land. A virulent epidemic of scarlet fever broke out, and invaded our household. Its black shadow darkened our home for nine long, weary months. It worked its ruthless will, and carried off our little sister. She was only eleven years of age, a fair and promising child. A small coloured lad also died. More of us were seriously ill, though some escaped. After some months, my father was attacked; but it did not take him badly. Then our tutor, who had already developed consumption, was smitten by this new scourge, yet he got over it all right. When every one else had recovered, my turn came. The fever was violent; but it ran its course and left me. Then, for want of proper precautions, dropsy supervened, and though I did not suffer much, my state was highly uncomfortable and dangerous. The new malady lasted for more than three months. The after effects were an ague that made itself felt, at intervals, over a period of thirty years.

In the latter part of that sad 1877, our tutor, with his young wife and little girl, left us and went to Natal. From there he sailed for England, with his family, about a twelve-month later, and died shortly after his arrival, leaving behind him his widow, the three-year-old little girl, and an infant son that was born in Natal. Twenty-four years afterwards I saw them in England, and was present at the daughter's wedding. The son joined up in the Great War, and died before it was over.

The year 1878 was, as I have previously stated, also a very hard year. The rains were scant and irregular, and no headway was made against the frightful losses of the preceding year. Then followed 1879, with abundant rain, too much rain, and damage and losses. It was a difficult year ; but there was progress. It was the time of the great Zulu War with its disastrous and stirring incidents. The large dam at Beaufort West was nearly swept away, the town was inundated and suffered considerably. A deal of havoc was wrought in various parts.

As for myself, I had developed a painfully weak eyesight. It was a great hardship, and, under the circumstances, little short of a calamity. To realize fully what it meant, you require to have lived and worked on a Karroo farm, where good eyesight was essential and of first-class importance, and to have suffered with the same malady. The attendant humiliations were very bitter. In July of that year, I finally left the old place, very sad, but with a deal of compensating relief. Yet it was a dear old spot, and, to me, always fair and beautiful, that beloved homestead on the Karroo farm. And it will always be fair and desirable, above the many places on earth, where I have wandered since.

PART X

ACCESSORIES

I HAVE given a sketch of farming in the Karroo as it was conducted in the earlier days. It would apply to the greater extent at this day. I will now briefly review the accessories to the industry. These have since been considerably modified. I will also deal with some of the aspects and their incidentals, showing that these aspects have entirely passed away, and how and why the great change has been brought about.

The farms were much larger, in general, than they are to-day. Many were 50,000 to 100,000 acres in size, and were thirty to forty miles away from the nearest "Dorp," or village, where repairs or other things could be done, or the regular supplies and necessaries could be obtained. There were no telegraphs, no railways, and no motors. The serious delays that would otherwise be involved, alone made it vitally important to be independent of the Dorp to the greatest possible degree. For these reasons, we had our own smithy, forge, and anvil, with all the accompanying implements ; a carpenter's bench, a vice, and a full complement of carpenter's tools and appliances. We had a grindstone, an oilstone, and such details as a mason's square, plumbline, trowels, a spirit level, a machine for threading a bolt, a drawing saw for cutting up large stumps of wood, picks, crowbars, hand-drills, stone-chisels, farriers' implements, with a stock of horseshoes, a screwjack, a lifting-jack, an adze, and a set of cobbler's tools. We kept a stock of timber, mostly deals, a supply of screws, nails, bolts, nuts, copper wire, lead-piping, rope, rope yarn, paints, putty, oils, whitelead, tar, and a quantity of other materials and necessary things. We also had a soldering iron, and the requirements that go with it. Such contrivances as ladders, wheelbarrows, spades, shovels, etc., we had of course, and all the farmers still have them. What were all these things for ? We did our own welding, for there were always bars of iron to be joined or broken parts to be mended. We made and repaired our own gates, and did many carpenters' jobs. We shod our own horses. We built, roofed and floored our outhouses, and our station rooms and dwellings. We made our own stone kraals and enclosures. We sank the wells, built the dams, rigged and mended the pumps ourselves. Our shepherds made us " veldshoes " from the skins and hides of our own animals. We mixed our own paints, moulded bullets for our guns and rifles, and repaired our pans and kettles. For ten years we had a handy man who did all these things, and did everything else that he was put to, and did it serviceably.

As for conveyances, carts, and wagons, I have already given account of them. We had a plough with spares, a harrow, and all digging and tilling implements, for we kept a garden with an orchard and a vineyard. We grew pumpkins, mealies and other vegetables ; also lucerne, barley, and oats, for the stable-horses and the stud-rams. The garden was supplied with water from the large tank, 20 feet square and 5 feet deep. The windmill pumped water into this tank from the river-pool. We also grew considerable crops of mealies and pumpkins in the summer, and of wheat in the winter, at the nine-mile outstation. The lands there were irrigated from a large dam. We had a forage and chaff-cutting machine. We had a threshing-floor in those days, and it answered our purpose.

By this, you will have arrived at the conclusion, that the so-called accessories were in themselves several industries, and that conjointly they formed quite a big industry, entailing a large amount of work, and a formidable number of details and duties throughout the year. And you will be about right.

PART XI

ASPECTS

Now let us consider the aspects with their inseparable incidentals. I refer to the social and domestic aspects, mainly as they differ from situations otherwise occurring and from other homes differently placed. They have no material connection with the farming in itself. But they shed a flood of light on the farm-life of the early days, and are of the utmost importance to those who would understand their significance. They were also mainly due to the fact that facilities for travelling were few and indifferent, that the world in general had not nearly advanced to its present stage of development, and that our South Africa in particular was as yet very backward. Besides the absence of railways, cables and telegraphs, we had also no steamship services.

People moved about from place to place with carts and horses, and sometimes even with wagons and oxen. Strangers passing over a farm stayed for a day or two. If they appeared passably respectable, they were asked into the house. They were entertained, and they ate and slept there free of charge. They were the dear old days of open hospitality. Neighbours came to visit us, and often stayed for a week. Relations came from a hundred, possibly from two hundred miles away, in carts, and remained for a fortnight. They were not mere duty calls. They were visits prompted by genuine affection, and undertaken with much trouble, tediousness and endurance. Now they pass by in a motor-car. Possibly they stay over for the noon dinner-hour, as may be convenient. More than likely they will hurry by with a wave of the hand. They are busy and cannot stop for trifles. Or, they rush past in the train. They cannot possibly break their journey. They may do so at a future time that never comes. Visits are dictated by a sense of formal duty or decency. The old-fashioned ties of affection have sadly relaxed. Is it not greatly the outcome of much prosperity and too many comforts ? Surely nothing draws people together more than common adversity and suffering, when they find that they have need of each other. How many in all the Karroo would drive in a cart to-day, or ride on horseback for fifty miles, for the mere love of a friend, or a near relative, just to see his dear face once more, and to shake him by the hand again ?

It was quite the thing, in those days, to invite relations and friends from the Dorp to come and stay on the farm, and on account of the loneliness and the isolation, though their visit lasted over very many weeks, you were glad to have them. When they went away again you were sorry, and you missed them.

The curse of racialism was altogether unknown in our part. A Boer was pleased and proud to have a decent Englishman marry his daughter, and a good Englishman was glad to choose an eligible Boer girl as a partner. We did not consider whether our neighbours were Dutch or English, and we made no distinction. All were kindly and equally welcome.

At sundry times, and from sundry climes, we had men who came to us. They came from Cape Town, from England, from America, and from Australia, and some came from the sea. They stayed on a few days or they remained for a few weeks. Some were with us for months, and others stayed for many years. Travellers came along merely to have a look around, or in quest of health. There were adventurers and speculators. Others came "to learn farming." Some came to look for work. A few came to take up situations as teachers, or were on the look-out for such posts. Of those that came to look for health, most came too late. They died at the farm, or elsewhere in the country, at a place that they had thought might give them a better chance. A few went home to die amongst their people. It was very sad. The bolder and adventurous ones who were not ill, passed on to the "Diamond Fields," or to other places, and were seldom heard of more. Some that came to farm stayed to teach, others that came to teach, stayed, or went away, to farm. Those that came for work got it. If they were good men they remained, some of them for years. The best man among them was with us for ten years. Men of good standing shared the table with us, and became as members of the family. The sad cases were those of bad health and straitened circumstances. While recuperating they generally undertook the duties of teaching, so as to pay their way. It was hard. They were mostly far worse in condition than they imagined themselves to be, and we did not know till it was too late, and then we were sorry for them. By appointment, one poor fellow was sent for to the Dorp. It was rather a cold and drizzly day when he drove out to us. The next morning he was ill. He got up and dressed, but he could hardly walk. Early in the evening he went back to his room to turn in, and collapsed on the floor before he could get into bed. Next morning his condition was so serious that we sent for the doctor ; but he died before the day was out, and the doctor did not arrive till the day following. Inflammation had seized upon his poor lungs, or what was left of them, and he had succumbed to an attack of acute pneumonia. Yet according to the accounts he had given, there was little the matter with him. He was a young Englishman of good family, a sculptor, who had gained some credit in his art. Probably the nature of his occupation had been injurious to his health. The dust from the stone that he had carved had no doubt penetrated his lungs.

Another sad case was that of a splendid young Irishman, gay and cheerful, who, when he arrived, was almost a wreck. Yet his spirits were vital and buoyant, and he was full of hope. He was with us for the best part of a year, and then recognized that he was growing no better. He would go to Kimberley, where he thought the altitude and the climate might prove more favourable. So we made up a purse between us. The tears stood in his eyes, and he could not speak for the lump in his throat as he took it. His heart was too full. Within three days after he left us we heard that he was dead. A wire came from the manager of the hotel where he had put up, conveying the fatal news—for this was at a later period, when the telegraph was established. He had succumbed to hæmorrhage of the lungs. Poor fellow ! It was but the one end to the vain hope that all such as he indulged. And after all, was it not well that they hoped ?

There were those that came to learn farming.

Some came, following on appointment by correspondence. Others just came—to learn farming! If they could have known, how many would have come? Little did they imagine, little did any one of them realize that the chance of success lay in the devotion of a life's work. A few stayed but for a while and went back. We laughed and thought them poor fools. Were they? Some were very wise. They succeeded in other callings that were less exacting, of which they had a better idea, and which were more congenial. Good luck to them! Some stayed for two years before a full sense of the position dawned upon them, and they understood that, without backing of the necessary capital, it would be very many years ere they could hope to find their feet. And then they also went away to take up other occupations, or, maybe, one or more would drift back to the farm-life, which had already got too strong a grip of them. I remember one fine, big, genial, strong young fellow who was with us for quite a while. The "Diamond Fields" were at the height of their fame. It was in the early days, in the latter part of 1869. Every week came stories of the wealth that was being picked up, and the fortunes that were being amassed. A gloom of depression hung over the Cape. There was no money in the country. The balance of trade was heavily adverse. Prices of commodities were low, and business was carried on by barter to a considerable extent. "The Fields" were the one bright spot where the glittering gems shone from afar, the great magnet that drew all eyes and lured the denizens of the world from over the seas. This young man would also go. He was a likely hand, for he was big, strong and fearless. He took his revolver, his bowie-knife, and a little money. He bade us good-bye, and we wished him God-speed. He promised to write. We had one letter, then a second to say that he was working hard, and was tired. Then we heard that he was dead. The dread "camp-fever" had claimed him as one of its many victims. And so ended his young dream of wealth. It was indeed pathetic.

PART XII

ASPECTS AND INCIDENTALS (*continued*)

Now I will tell you of one who came to farm, but stayed to teach. He was one of the very first that came, a young man, an American, well dressed, of good education and a gentleman. He was sent to the ten-mile station, and when things were slack, he used to ride over to the homestead on our trusty old horse, "Rietbok,"—specially mentioned in a later chapter—and spend the Sunday. At his first Christmas on the lonely station, he was determined to have his pudding. He took some flour, mixed it with water, added sugar, and kneaded it into a paste. This he shaped into a ball, stuck it full of dried peaches—no currants or raisins being available—wrapped it in an old but clean linen shirt, and put it into a pot to boil. He left it on the fire for many hours, and then took it out. The pudding was a success, so he said, only the peaches were very hard. What a wonder! He might have boiled it for a week.

The peaches should, of course, have been stewed before being put into the pudding. He stuck out the life for a time, but found it beyond him. He came back to the homestead, and was intending to leave us on the following day. My father suggested that he might stay on to teach the children. He said that he would think it over. Next morning he handed my father a letter of compliance. He was fond of writing! Terms were arranged, and he entered upon his new duties forthwith. This would have been early in 1866, for I was but five years of age, and he was our first tutor. Well do I remember the excitement as we trooped into school. He was with us first and last for a period of four years.

So far as the mere faculty of teaching was concerned he was quite equal to it. As I have said, he was a man of education, and a gentleman. But there was another side to the problem. He knew nothing of child-life, nor anything about children and their nature. I think that no one who has not the qualities for taking the place of a father or a mother should have the charge of children. I believe that much harm has been done, and is still resulting, through the disregard of this principle. We made progress in learning. Oh yes! we were a fairly bright lot. But we were far from happy. He spoke little. He was a silent man. He was just, or tried to be so—a man of stern integrity. He had a certain geniality, and a little kindliness. But he was severe, almost morose. He was a God-fearing man; but the nature of his religion was a rigid Calvinism.

"As the tree falls, so shall it lie." But he gave it little chance to fall the right way. His doctrine was that of deadly fear. The God of Israel and of the fiery serpents of vengeance yet prevailed over the God of the Cross and of infinite mercy. The foundation of abiding love lay too deep—remote and invisible. He would say that if you told a lie God might strike you dead, even as he did Ananias and Sapphira. All your sins, little and big, would accumulate, and on the Day of Judgment God would open wide your eyes, and you would be forced to behold your wickedness. These things terrified me and did not make me any better. I wished that there was no God, and was the more fearful when I realized, as far as my child-mind was capable of it, the appalling sinfulness of the wish.

He was stern with us, and we got more frowns than smiles. After school hours he went his way and we went ours. The only exception was in his predilection for kite-flying. He made us a good, large kite, and helped us to fly it. If our father happened from home for a few days, he ruled us with harshness. We did not complain. We were too afraid. Yet I am convinced that he meant well, and only exercised discipline according to his lights. The hours were long—six daily for the first five days of the week, and three on Saturdays, besides our night lessons, which meant another two hours. All the holidays we had was a week at Christmas, one on each of our birthdays, one on our father's birthday, and one on each of the public holidays, which were fewer then. That was all.

It was absurd ; but it seemed to suit the humour of our tutor, and our father did not interfere.

He left us late in 1868, and we had a few letters from him afterwards. He had long aspired to become an author, and used to write many pages while he was still with us, and then destroy them, being dissatisfied with his efforts. He returned to " The States," and when last he wrote he said that he was married, and added that he was " surrounded by a circle of appreciating friends." He meant, of course, to say *appreciative*, for he was a scholar. He sent us his wife's photo, and also a booklet of his poems. They had merit, but they were of the mind and not of the heart. There were copious notes to justify phrases and expressions, and to quote authorities in support. This but emphasized the laboured nature of the production. What has the poet, who should write from the heart, to do with what others have written, or *how* they wrote ?

The severity of his tenets reminds me of something I heard later. It was about a negro preacher addressing his congregation, and who spoke as follows :—

> " Now brethren and sistren, dere am only two roads : Dere am de berry straight and berry crooked road, as leads to perdition. Den dere am also de berry broad and berry narrow road, as leads to sure destruction."

At which awesome announcement of impending doom, a voice from the back of the gathering cried out :

> " Well, if dat am de case, den dis ere gent takes to de woods ! "

However, our first tutor was an upright, sincere and conscientious man, and whatever he did, I am sure that he at least tried to do his duty. We would all like to have as much said of ourselves!

After him, we had another tutor, whom my father had secured by correspondence, and who came to relieve the previous one of his responsibilities. In fact, the departing teacher was dispatched to the Dorp with a cart and a pair of mules to fetch the new-comer! The journey was celebrated in the book of poems that the first tutor composed later: the verses bore the appropriate heading of "The two Professors," and were the best thing in the book. A most amusing incident attended the arrival of these two "Professors" at the homestead on the following evening. An additional bed had been placed in the "schoolmaster's room," it having been arranged that the pair should temporarily share the apartment. We had three young lady visitors staying at the farm. They were a lively lot and gloried in a practical joke. They hung a bucket of water on a nail in the lintel of the door, which opened inwards, so that anyone entering, would tilt the bucket, and the contents would be discharged upon his head. "But the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley." The Professors marched to their quarters. The new arrival led the way, for the room had already been pointed out to him. When he got to the door he courteously stepped aside, that his senior might enter first. The latter turned the handle and pushed the door. There was a thundering crash and a tremendous splash. The nail had given way and the bucket was precipitated to the floor. The senior had received but a sprinkling. He turned furiously upon the new arrival, and accused him of having been privy to the plot. Why had he stepped aside to let him, the senior, go in first ? In vain did the other affirm that it was but an act of common politeness, and protest his innocence. The argument waxed hot, and things began to look serious, till my father intervened and poured oil upon the troubled waters. Our first tutor left us two days after this. There was an air of impressive solemnity, a sense of mutual esteem, and a deal of regret as he bade his adieux. We felt that they were final, as indeed they afterwards proved to be, and we were sorry. Such partings were taken very seriously in the simple life on the lonely farm.

PART XIII

ASPECTS AND INCIDENTALS (*continued*)

HIS successor, who reigned in his stead, was a B.A. of Oxford, highly competent, a man with progressive ideas, and a good deal of enthusiasm. The first thing he did was to arrange with our father that the number of our holidays should be largely increased. Ten days at Easter, two weeks in July, and a fortnight at Christmas, was the new programme. This was liberty indeed ! We did not know ourselves. And they were yet further extended a little later on. Each fortnightly period was increased to three weeks. Hurrah ! It seemed too good to be true.

He also became our companion, joined in our games, and went to the veld with us. But he was likewise, though to a lesser extent, deficient in a knowledge of children and their ways, and misinterpreted their actions. Otherwise he was a splendid tutor. He had another defect. All of us have shortcomings. But I am trying to give faithful sketches. He seemed to set no value on the lives of the lower animals, domestic or wild. If they gave a little trouble, he would ruthlessly destroy them. In this he was utterly callous, *and did not know it!* I have noticed the same trait in other men—men of many excellencies—who also appeared to sin quite insensibly in this respect. But it was dreadful! Had they kept pets when they were young, and learned to love them, they would surely have been different. But they had only been accustomed to hunting and destroying. This explanation applies to the cases that I have known of.

Our second tutor was, however, a lover of plants and flowers. He made an extensive botanical collection with our assistance, and sent it, for classification, to a Professor of Botany, who was then on a scientific visit to South Africa. He sent duplicate specimens, and the Professor retained one each of such as he required, returning the rest, duly labelled with their high-sounding, classical names, to our tutor. He also liked to grow beautiful things, and took charge of our flower garden, which he greatly improved. He stayed for two years, and then returned to England; but we were to hear of him again, and he was to be a good deal yet in our lives.

It was now the year 1870, when our mother died. It was a great calamity. She had been a good mother, and had toiled hard for our welfare.

We still had teachers coming along. One stayed for three months. He had been a considerable traveller; but he was a taciturn man. His disposition was not happy. He appeared to have suffered some disappointment in life, and not to have taken it well.

After him came another, who stayed for six months, a very pleasant gentleman. His abilities were medium, but he did not do badly, and we liked him. He went to the veld with us, and took an almost childish interest in everything, down to the smallest ants, and other insects. He was out from England for the first time, and things were new to him. He used to go for evening walks. Once he came rushing back to say that he had heard a rattlesnake! The sound was no doubt produced by some of those dry pods, containing loose seeds, blowing along the ground. One plant in particular bears these rattling seed pods.

Another time came a report that a "wolf"—*hyena*—had been caught in the large stone trap that we had built on the mountain-side. Away we all hurried, he in the van and carrying the gun. We found the wolf right enough, and fired two bullets into him between the stone bars; but we only wounded him. As we had six dogs we decided to "give him a run for his money." The heavy door of the trap was raised; but he would not budge. Our big kaffir boy quickly sharpened the end of his stick, twirled it fast in the shaggy mane of the animal, and by a series of vigorous jerks, hauled him out. Instantly the dogs were upon him; but it was seen that his wounds were not of much account. A shout was raised for the gun; but no one had it! Looking about, we saw the tutor tearing along the slope with our only weapon. One of us rushed off in pursuit. Meanwhile the dogs made no impression on the wolf, beyond preventing him from getting away, and tiring him out; for like his kind, he was big and strong, with a thick, tough skin, and a hard, sinewy body. A pack of dogs could not deal with him, unassisted. When the dogs stopped for a blow, our kaffir belaboured him by means of his terrible "knob kierie"—*knobbed stick*—with a rain of blows on his vulnerable throat. One stroke over his massive, iron head would have shattered the stick. He succumbed under these tactics; but it took an hour. Our tutor came back, under escort, with the gun; but we were already in the way of being able to dispense with the reinforcement. I do not wonder at his fright, for the din and commotion of those dogs, and that huge wolf, snarling and struggling together, was a terrific sight, and would have scared most who were not accustomed to such scenes.

It was 1871 when he left us. My cousin met him three years later in London—down Piccadilly way I think it was—cheerful as ever. I can see him sauntering along, swinging that stick of his, down that wonderful thoroughfare, through the Green Park, and into the beautiful St. James's Park.

He contemplates the fairy scene, the stately trees, the rich shrubbery, and the limpid lake. Pleasantly he beholds the water-birds, and marks their ways. He lifts his eyes to those grey heavens, and he thinks of sunny South Africa, with its sky that looks so blue, and the far-away Karroo, with its soaring eagles, its bounding bucks, and creeping tortoises, where also the sacred mantis finds sanctuary, and raises its arms in blessing. But the sunshine of his day has passed, and doubtless he has long since entered into his rest ; for by now he would be a full four-score. Oh, Father Time ! We look back over the weary years, and we bow our grey heads. The sands run low, and they are ever running.

Part XIV

ASPECTS AND INCIDENTALS (*continued*)

My two elder brothers were now sent to the Diocesan College, Cape Town, for a year, and my younger brother and I went to the village public school for the same period. Then our second tutor returned from England with his young bride, and took us all in charge once more. This was in 1872. A few months previously, our father had married again, and we were endowed with a stepmother. The usual trouble followed. We resented interference, and when she attempted to assert authority, we rebelled. She spoke of a great sacrifice, and bewailed her lot on a miserable farm. She wished herself back in beautiful Cape Town. We echoed the sentiment, and also made unfavourable comparisons of the new times with the dear olden and bygone days. There were faults on both sides. We were a big handful, and not given to making allowances, for our own lives were not cast in soft places. Naturally, she complained to our father, who tried to hold the balance, but would not actively interfere. We were growing big boys. As the years sped on, the business of the farm gradually and automatically passed into our hands. Our father was getting on in years, and, following the usual custom, he finally retired to the village, with our stepmother and her little boy and girl. Her own mother, a dear, hard-working old lady, who had come with her from Cape Town, and our youngest brother, accompanied them. This episode is but a link in the chain. I should not mention it otherwise. However, there can be no harm done, and none is intended. It was all so natural!

Our tutor stayed for five years after his second advent. On a previous page, I mention his leaving for Natal (1877, ten years before our father retired to the village), and a year later for England, where he died shortly after his arrival. I also said that I met his widow and family in England twenty-four years subsequently. His departure marked the close of our scholastic careers, as far as we four elder brothers were concerned. There was tuberculosis in his family, and he had lost a brother. When he came to us the second time, he seemed to be in good health; but he had a noticeable cough. Two and a half years later, the disease laid its dread hand on his shoulders. It gripped his lungs, and bowed him down. He wasted away, then rallied wonderfully, and with the putting on of flesh returned also hope, that sweet companion, whom we cling to and entertain so lavishly, because it makes so many fair, though false, promises. He coped manfully with his duties ; but grew steadily worse.

He was a good and highly capable man, well-bred, conscientious, and scholarly, and whatever faults he may have had, his memory commands profound respect.

PART XV

ASPECTS AND INCIDENTALS (*concluded*)

THESE sketches and incidents serve to shed light on aspects inseparable from life on the Karroo farms in those days, when schools were few and far away. I will give you the last, and not the least interesting, under this head. It was some years later (1882). It concerns a young Scotchman. Two remarkable items in his appearance were his big, strong, reddish-brown beard, and his fiery eyes, which looked clean through you, and out on the other side. If you did not brace up, and counter with your hardest stare, it positively hurt. Nor did you wish it to appear that you could not look him in the face. He came to teach ; but stayed to farm, and did well, for he had grit and go. He was appropriately nicknamed Sandy by a few who learnt to know him well.

As there were only three children to teach, it was arranged that he should also attend to the "shop." Sunday was the favourite, and generally the only day possible for boys working at neighbouring places to come for their needs. Sandy soon found this out, and, after several calls for his services one Sabbath, he exclaimed, "Six days shalt thou labour, and on the seventh shalt thou run over to the shop and back!"

But he soon picked up enough of farming methods, and as he had some money, he bought a lot of sheep, and hired a place. He did fairly well; but a neighbour gave him a deal of annoyance. One day the latter rode over, and handed him an impertinent letter. Sandy read it as he stood in the open doorway, the bearer waiting by his horse the while. "Hold hard a moment!" cried Sandy, and dived into the house. He quickly emerged, armed with a horsewhip, got a grip-hold of the messenger, and thrashed him soundly!

In an assault case before the magistrate, on another occasion, Sandy produced a large bunch of his red beard, wrapped in a paper, as visible evidence in his favour. A Cape boy had plucked it out in the tussle!

Many years later, the Great Boer War broke out, and the district was invaded by two rebel "Commandoes," that gave a lot of trouble. Amongst others, Sandy volunteered for service against them. One Commando in particular, under a one-eyed terror as their leader, kept things warm. Sandy expressed a great desire to come to grips with this man. He was riding out, scouting, when suddenly the one-eyed appeared out of nowhere, as was his wont, and pulled up his horse within thirty paces. Sandy promptly dismounted, and, standing by his horse, commenced to fumble with the lock of his gun, which was evidently unloaded. He had been taken by surprise. The one-eyed raised his rifle, and before Sandy was ready, deliberately shot him through the lungs. The Boer was a cool hand, used to the wiles of guerilla warfare. Poor old Sandy was a plucky fellow ; but his excitement and unpreparedness were, alas ! only too clear a sign of his inexperience. He breathed for hours after that fatal shot ; but he never recovered consciousness. He was but one of the many victims of that dreadful three years of war.

The days of private tutors on the farms have passed, and the country is now dotted with Government institutions. There is at least mental and material, if not *moral* improvement. We are progressing ! But are we improving ? I see the pathways strewn with the precious jewels that we have cast from us in our headlong, heedless hurry. In their stead we have loaded ourselves with sham and glittering baubles. The ties of affection are fast being severed. The temple that was held sacred to the dear familiar friends, is now filled with an army of agreeable and adulating acquaintances. Shall we turn again ere it be too late ? Shall we yet abandon the vain and worthless dross, and once more gather up the bright, true gold ? It is indeed devoutly to be wished !

Ruins of House of Sir J. C. Molteno, Nel'spoort.

CHAPTER II

WITTICISMS AND ANECDOTES

"I WENT THROUGH BETWEEN HIM!"

SIR JOHN MOLTENO, first Premier of the Cape under responsible Government, keenly relished a good joke, and was an excellent dinner table companion. But he seldom attempted any original humour himself, for he was a man of affairs, who took life seriously. Nevertheless, I think he holds pride of place for the best piece of witticism perpetrated in the Karroo. Seated at table on one of his occasional visits to our farm, he said this: "I was driving up the street in Beaufort West the other day, when I met a man, so drunk, that he was walking on both sides of the road at the same time, but by a great effort I managed to go through between him."

"WILLING BUT UNABLE"

The South African Dutchmen are generally supposed to be dull and slow witted, but their deficiencies are grossly exaggerated. I have heard them say uncommonly smart things, and tell some very clever stories. Here is a good one. Two Boers were sitting talking, and bragging about their favourite animals and their wonderful capabilities, as they love to do over a cup of coffee and a pipe, when at last one of them exclaimed: "Yes, you may talk about cattle, but there was that splendid ox of mine, Wildeman. He has surely never yet been matched. He is dead now, the poor dumb brute. His bones are bleaching in the sun among those trees near to the roadside. When the team wavered, and the wagon got stuck in going up a steep drift, he alone would take his yoke, and pull out the wagon with its load and the rest of the team. Now his skeleton lies gleaming out there in the veld; but I assure you, that if you drive past the spot, crack your whip, and cry out 'Wildeman!' you will see those same dry bones become agitated, and they will quiver in response. He is still willing, but he is not able!"

"HE SAID 'JA!'" (JA, PRONOUNCED YAH).

I have always considered the following a very clever story. Two Dutchmen were talking over the progress of the country, the keenness of competition, and the increasing difficulty of making a living, when one said: "The Englishman is too much for us, and we are handicapped by our very language. It is not up-to-date! Only last week I was returning from the Dorp. I had unyoked the oxen, and was sitting by my fire. I was finishing my supper, and there was one chop left, when up came our English friend Tom, and my neighbour Piet. They had been out looking for their horses, but had not found them, and they were tired and hungry. They asked if I had any food; but I replied that the chop on the coals was all, as I expected to be home for breakfast in the morning. Well, one chop between two big hungry men was ridiculous, and it was also hard to divide on account of the bone. So I thought we might as well have a bit of sport, and I suggested that each of them should take a grip of the piece with his teeth, and, at the word, they should have a tug for it. Tom readily assented; but Piet was slow to agree. I took the chop, and they each got a firm hold of it with their jaws. 'Are you ready!' I called. 'Yes!' said the Englishman between his clenched teeth. 'Ja!' cried Piet, opening wide his mouth, and letting go the lot! Now, I ask you, what chance have we against these clever Englishmen, with a rotten language like ours?"

"STILL WARM."

The Hottentots of the Karroo have passed away; but fifty years ago, they formed the majority of our herds and our farm hands. They had a sense of humour and said some witty things. On a summer day, one came to tell my father of the fresh track of a snake. "Are you sure it is fresh?" was the query. Prompt was the answer: "Yes, Baas; if you come and put your hand on it, you will find it still quite warm!" That snakes are cold-blooded, and that the boy was well acquainted with the fact, only added zest to the joke.

"COULD SEE A TORTOISE A MILE OFF!"

After the break-up of the great drought, 1877–79, one of our herds trekked back to the farm with his flock. On the way he passed through a strip of very sparse veld, in a neighbouring district. On being asked to describe it, he cried: "Oh, Baas, do not speak of it! You could see a tortoise walking as far as that tree over yonder!" With his stick he pointed to a tree more than a mile away. Thus he emphasized the exceptional barrenness of the veld in the part referred to.

"CRACKED A MARROW-BONE!"

I asked one of the hands if he knew what had become of another boy, a friend of his, of whom we had not heard for a long while. "He is in gaol, Baas," was the answer. "What did he do?" I inquired again. "He cracked a marrow-bone, Baas," was the reply! This was a humorously delicate way of saying that the absentee had stolen and killed a sheep!

"WHEN THOSE MOUNTAINS WERE HILLS."

A very old Hottentot had wandered back to the farm where he had worked when he was young. His white head was bowed and he leaned heavily on his stick. "What is your age, old man?" some one asked gently. The ancient raised his gnarled, wrinkled face, and looked up with bleared and half-blinded eyes towards the great range. He said: "Baas, do you see those big mountains over yonder?

When I first came here, they were but little hills ! ” He was very, very old. What mattered it ? He could not name the years.

“ MAKE A DAM ! ”

The most noticeable features of the Hottentot were their flat faces, high cheek bones, and wide, flat noses. But the most remarkable thing in the appearance of the women was their amazing steatopygia. This word cannot be elegantly translated ; but if I say that these ladies (?) did, in certain respects, resemble queen-ants vastly magnified, I may without vulgarity, make my meaning clearer.

Long ago, the house on our neighbour's farm was struck by lightning, and set alight. All hands were quickly summoned by ringing the alarm bell. A furrow of water ran close past the building ; but the gradient was considerable, and it was difficult to scoop out a full bucket. “ Make a dam ! Make a dam ! ” shouted the Baas. “ Wach, Baas, ik zal dam maak ! ”—*Wait, Baas, I will make a dam*—volunteered a magnificent type of the “ queen-ant woman,” plumped down, and sat flat in the furrow. The dam instantaneously materialized, the buckets filled as fast as they were dipped, and the fire was soon put out.

CHAPTER III

NATURE

PART I

ANIMAL LIFE IN THE KARROO

HAVE you considered the great variety and the large number of wild animals in the dreary, arid Karroo Desert? I ask this of you who live there. Having regard to the sparseness of the vegetation and the dearth of water, it is really wonderful. But nature is a marvellous provider, and all the difficulties are smoothed away. The herbivorous animals thrive upon the bushes, no matter how hard or coarse they are, or how scant they appear. Either they are not water drinkers, or the dewdrop on the leaves suffice to quench their thirst. There is food in the air, nourishment upon the earth, sustenance in the ground, and provision beneath the soil. There is also much food for the mind. There is " Manna in the Desert."

There are still seven species of antelopes. In days gone by there were many more. They have fallen back before the advance of man, with his fire-arms, his railways, his motor-cars, and his wire fences. But the " springbok " yet roams the plains in large herds. As I write this June month of 1919, there comes the report from Beaufort West that a small party of guns drove out thirty miles South-Westwards of the town, and bagged no less than seventy head of buck! Thirty years ago I saw 1,300 springbok in one flock, only twelve miles from that same town. Sixty years ago you may have seen 10,000 together. They are fewer now, but there are still many. Here and there on a farm you may see an isolated lot that have been fenced in by wire. Six years ago I drove along a road that skirted one of these fences, and I passed within fifty yards of half a dozen of these beautiful creatures. They scarcely lifted their heads from the grazing, so tame had they become.

There are a few "Koodoo" left; but they are seldom seen. The koodoo is a grand specimen of the antelope world, being as large as a donkey, and bearing a truly magnificent pair of horns, which shoot up from the head, with a majestic spiral sweep, to a vertical height of 4 feet from the base. But there are too many guns, and too many good shots in the Karroo, and the size of the animal is against him, for he presents a large target to the rifle. A clump of nearly fifty from the neighbouring Government reservations gave trouble recently on the farmers' lands in the Uitenhage Division near Port Elizabeth.

We have also the graceful little "Steenbok"—*Stone-buck* (because of his colour),—about half the size of the springbok. For the first mile of his run, he is extraordinarily fleet, and is often mistaken at a distance for a swift, low-flying bird. They are shy and secretive, and you seldom see more than one at a time. They may still be found over a wide range; but they never have been many. They have to beware of the great eagle and the jackal, as they are a handy size for these to tackle.

Next, is the ubiquitous Duiker—*Diver*. Wherever there are trees, or thickets, and high shrubs, and where he can get an occasional drink of water (for he is a thirsty soul), there you may find him. You will get but a mere glimpse, for with a succession of tremendous bounds, he will *dive* into the thicket and be lost to view. In size he is half-way between the steenbok and the springbok, and there is nothing remarkable about his appearance. His colour is a brick-tinged brown.

Now we come to the mountains, the home of the fine, sturdy "Rhebok"—*the blowing or whistling buck*. At sight of you he gives his peculiar danger-signal call, a sound produced by the lips, and you can hear it some hundreds of yards away. The tame goats emit a similar sound when startled, and in the same way. If you are above him, he will rush down the declivity at a fearful rate, and, without a halt, will leap sheer over a thirty-foot precipice. For a moment you think he has been dashed to pieces, but then you see him continuing his flight below—unharmed, the white hair of his tail showing conspicuously. He is as big as the springbok, with similar, but somewhat smaller horns, and is a little stouter in build. In the Karroo he numbers at least two kinds—*the tawny* and *the red*.

Lastly is our South African Chamois, the little "Klipbok"—*Rockbuck*—no larger than the steenbok. Instead of hair, he has bristles, and is of the colour of the surrounding rocks and difficult to see. He has toes rather than hoofs, and the heel of the foot is heavily padded with bristly hair. He runs along the face of a precipice that appears perpendicular to the naked eye. He takes the most amazing leaps from one ledge of rock to another, and if pressed, will jump off a hundred-foot precipice without hurt. My cousin was out once with his gun and dogs, and hearing a rustle, he looked up, and saw a klipbok come hurtling down, spreadeagle, from the rocks, at a height of 150 feet; but this must have been a fall. It landed close to him, in a thick bush, which it smashed, scraping off a profusion of its bristles in the rough contact. He moved forward to pick up the buck's mangled body, as he thought; but it jumped up, passed through among the dogs, and made good its escape before he recovered from his surprise. I have heard much of the chamois and his leaping abilities, but I would be willing to match our little klipbok against him if it could be done!

This completes our "budget" of the antelopes; but before we descend the mountains let us take stock of other of our four-footed—or four-legged—friends, who favour these regions. There, dwell the ungainly baboons, though they do us no great credit. In past times I have seen them in lots of 200, and more, together; but now you may see thirty or forty at most. Every man's hand is against them, for they are a mischievous crew. They are classed as vermin, a reward being paid for their destruction. But they have their uses, and are not seriously harmful as a rule.

Next is the "Rock-rabbit," a species of the hyrax, Of his kind there are hundreds, wherever the rocks or boulders provide them with shelter and hiding-places. They make excellent pets if taken young, and are easily reared. They are as large as rabbits; but tail-less.

Then follows the "Red-tailed Rabbit," on the lower slopes. But you see more of him on the lower ranges and among the "kopjes." He is the size of an ordinary rabbit, his flesh is similar, and he is very good eating.

Here, also, you may see the "Mountain Hare." He is bigger than the rabbit, and the largest of our hares.

Then we have the "Ratel," somewhat resembling the English badger. He is ever in search of honey. His thick hide is proof against the stings of bees, and he protects his nose by thrusting it between his paws. His body is a mass of sinews, and he is amazingly strong. No matter how a dog may seize him, his skin fits so loosely that he can turn inside it and bite his assailant.

PART II

ANIMAL LIFE (*continued*)

WE now arrive in the large kloofs running along the base of the mountain. Here you may find the "Rooi-Kat"—*Red Cat,* or lynx—and you may also

South African Tiger.

Porcupines of South Africa.

[*See p.* 110.

happen on the Jackal and the " Weer-Wolf "—*Were-Wolf* (in reality the Aard-Wolf—*Earth-Wolf*). The last is here now. I dug a pair of them out of their hole in 1876, and they were the last I saw. The lynx also haunts the high bush along the dry watercourses, and the jackal is scattered all over the plains. The latter is the most cunning of the animals. A war of extermination has been waged on him incessantly for generations; but he still keeps his end up. He is much in evidence, every farmer has his quota, and suffers from his depredations. The Jackal numbers two species in the Karroo. There were, and still may be, three.

We have yet to deal with two of the large denizens that inhabit the mountain ranges. First is the " Tiger," the Leopard of South Africa, a formidable and ferocious brute, that has slain a good few men who have attempted to hunt him down. We used to set a large trap that we built of heavy slabs of sand-stone. It had a sliding stone door that ran in a groove. There was a hole through the upper part of the door, through which a length of rope was passed and knotted. The other end of the rope ran over a big grooved stone placed on the top of the trap, and then, between two slabs, into the rear of the trap. The tail of the rope was tied to the blunt end of a wooden stake, the sharp end being driven through a shoulder of mutton as a bait, and then fixed in a crevice, between two stones, in the back wall of the trap. The rope being of a right length, it held up the stone door. The animal entered, seized the bait and dragged it towards him, also pulling out the stake, and the heavy door, released from its moorings, fell with a thud. The startled animal whisked round to find himself a prisoner. In this way we caught a few of these predatory brutes. Over a space of six or seven years we also trapped thirteen of the second large rover, the "Wolf," a very large Hyena, and a cowardly, but fierce brute, with large head, wide, powerful jaws, and strong teeth, that will crush the marrow-bone of an ox, so it is said! And when you look at those dreadful jaws, you will hardly doubt it. He has a thick skull, hard as iron, massive and immensely strong forequarters, a thick and very tough skin, and a hard and sinewy body. A pack of dogs will make no impression on him, and if you give them the newly flayed skin, they will pull it about for twenty minutes without tearing a hole in it. For many years we displayed the skulls of our thirteen wolves, ranged in a row, on the wall of the horse kraal.

We now pass through the valley and on to the open plain.

By chance we may fall in with the "Luipaard"—*Leopard*, or South African *cheetah*, taller than, and as long, though not so bulky, as our tiger—the true leopard. But he is an arrant coward. My father once forced his way into a thicket where one had taken refuge and killed it with a short "knobkerrie" (knobbed stick). Another time a neighbour of ours, while out on horseback on the veld, happened on four of these brutes. He was unarmed, so he unhooked a stirrup-iron, with its leather strap, from his saddle. He then rode them down successively, and dispatched them all with the improvised weapon. When closely pressed, they throw themselves on their backs and claw, and are easily killed with a stout stick or a serviceable substitute. They are very destructive. It is written that the leopard cannot change his spots, which is true in the sense that it is meant to be. Otherwise, he is here one evening, and twenty miles away the next, as you may find if ever you should try to hunt him. He is a *beast of passage* !

We find many holes of the " Aardvark "—*Earth pig*, or South African ant-eater ; but we seldom see him. He is hard to dig out, because he can dig the faster. His powers in this respect are almost incredible. Two of my brothers with two other young men sighted one as they were driving along the level plain in an open cart. They immediately galloped the horses up to him. As they arrived he began to dig furiously, and scattered the earth and stones with such force that they could not stand close to him. In a couple of minutes he had dug a space of a capacity nearly sufficient to conceal his body. They fired four bullets into him before he ceased operations. Then they tried to pull him out, but could not shift him. They took a halter " Reim " (thong) from one of the horses, cut a hole in the thick sinewy tail of the " aardvark," looped the " reim " through it, and with the united strength of all the four of them dragged him out. He was quite dead ; but in the act of dying, he had struck into the sides of the hole with his mighty, pickaxelike claws, and had held with a grip like that of a crab in a crevice!

Here and there we come across the "Ijzer Vark"—*Iron-pig*, or porcupine. I have often dug him out of his hole—a little hard work, but not difficult. It is not true that he can discharge his quills like arrows from a bow. He whisks round sharply, turning his back on his assailant, and, simultaneously spreading out his stiletto-like weapons, bumps into him. The needle points penetrate inches deep into the body of the baffled foe, and as the thicker and blunted ends of the quills are only attached lightly, and to a fractional depth, in the skin of the porcupine, they are immediately plucked out of his body by his howling and retreating opponent, and transferred to the painful and unwilling custody of the latter.

Only once in my life I also dug a "Tiger-cat" out of a burrow, away on the plain; but that was forty-five years ago. He was prettily marked, somewhat like our tiger, and has been named accordingly. I think he is now extinct in our part of the world. It was the only one I ever saw or heard of.

In the jungles along our dry watercourses, the "Graauw Kat"—*Grey Cat*, very similar to our domestic cat, and of the same species, I believe—is still common, and the "Civet-cat" or "Musk-cat," is also numerous in those haunts. The Otter yet lingers in the water-pools, as also does the misnamed "River Muishond"—*Mouse-dog*, or Water-Monkey. But they are both very rare.

Either in the valleys or on the plains, may be found the "Bont Muishond"—*Spotted Mouse-dog*, or skunk—that makes a capital pet, has a long, wavy-haired, bushy tail, and does not emit the obnoxious odour when it is tame and undisturbed.

Also the "Wit-kwast Muishond"—the *White-brush Mouse-dog*, or skunk—and the lively, perky "Meerkat," that is so easily reared and tamed, and is a jolly little pet. All these animals live mainly on mice, of which we have four distinct species in the Karroo. Then there is the "Schuur Muis" (equivalent to the Dormouse), and the beautiful little "Jerboa," with its bright, soft, furry coat, long trunk, and long hind legs, on which it leaps, like a kangaroo, at great speed; but these are mistakenly classed as mice by the farmers.

The useful, common little bat flies at night snapping up the mosquitoes and the flies.

The mole is troublesome on the lands in many parts, though he has his uses, which are not appreciated.

PART III

ANIMAL LIFE (*continued*)

REPTILES

STILL keeping on the ground floor let us consider the tortoises. I know of eight species. Three dwell in the mountains and higher hills, and attain to a considerable size and weight, from fifteen to about forty pounds. The small, flattish, red-shelled one abounds on the lesser ranges, and moves at a comparatively great rate, and he even runs at a fair pace when he is alarmed. And he has reason for his hurry. The rooks, the crows, and the hawks seize upon him with their talons, bear him aloft, and drop him upon the hard, iron-stone boulders, to burst his shell asunder, so that they may devour his flesh. His armoured casing is not proof against such drastic treatment, and you may find many poor fragments lying scattered over the stony eminences, in mute testimony of the hard fact, and his sad and by no means soft fate! The remaining four of the smaller species roam over the wide veld. One kind is remarkable, and is exceedingly rare. The last and only ones I saw were a pair that I discovered myself when I was but a young boy. They were considerably the largest of the lesser species, and had prettily marked and elegantly curved oval-shaped shells, with a notable and most peculiar projection, 2½ inches long, in front for their abnormally long necks—which they could nevertheless draw back into security—to rest upon. I found them on the site of an old "Werf," where the sheep had long before slept for years, and which had become overgrown with strange and rank weeds that drew nourishment from the manure. The colouring of their shells harmonized well with the herbage of their immediate environment, and it was only by a close search that I got them. I followed long and patiently on the "spoor"—*footprints*—of each one individually, till I could lay my hand on it. It is astonishing the distance that even a tortoise will cover in the course of a day's wanderings!

Of snakes there are a dozen species, six of which carry enough venom to kill a man! These latter are the Puffadder, the Yellow Cobra, the brown Cobra, the Treesnake—" Boomslang "—the Horned adder ("Horensman," or *Horned man*), and the Night-adder. The other six are harmless. The most notable are the large Black snake, which is a famous mouser, and the " Zweepslang "—*Whip-snake*, from his resemblance to the whip that the shepherds make and use. Worthy of mention, too, is the little "Egg-eater," that is only about ten inches in length, and swallows a hen's egg whole. He works his jaws over the egg, and when they are half-way round, there is a faint, pencil-like line to define their edges, and the head itself is flattened out into a thin, transparent parchment, with two tiny dots to mark the eyes. The process lasts many minutes, and when at last his task is accomplished, he lies for hours, inert and helpless, with his little body fearfully distended and horribly distorted. It is one of the things that must be seen to be thoroughly realized, or even believed! Lastly, I must also speak of the light and bright yellow snake, about two feet long, and of a reasonable girth, that I have tried all my art to take, but have never succeeded. Suddenly he appears before your eyes as you walk among the brown stones on the lower ranges, and, as you stoop to seize him, he is as quickly gone. Again he is there right before you, and darts like lightning for a few paces. You follow hurriedly, and almost treading upon him, and once more he vanishes. Yet again he is here, close to you; but as you look he melts away, and finally you may search for him in vain. Neither will you find any likely lodgment, or hiding-place, that may account for his escape. I followed one, with the dogs (who also saw him), and with stones, for about twenty minutes. He appeared and vanished, materialized and was gone, half a dozen times; but not even with the aid of the dogs could I catch him. He is the will-o'-the wisp in the world of snakes. I have spoken of him to the shepherds, but they could or would tell me nothing. I truly believe that they regard him as an illusion, and look upon him with a superstitious dread, and as a thing not to be talked about. Nor has anyone I have ever met been able to enlighten me. Yet with all his mystery he is a material and substantial fact, although I am growing old, and have all my life been unable satisfactorily to account for him! I think that in motion the flash of his colour makes him visible, but that the moment he stops, it dies down, and he is rendered invisible by the contrast.

Among other reptiles is the large, square-headed "Likkewaan"—*Leguan*—that differs remarkably from those further north. A large variety of the useful lizards keep us company in the Karroo, and they would repay a close study. The "Kochel-Manders"—*Mocking Lizards*—of which there are three kinds, are the most interesting. The larger blue-headed ones sit on a stone, or on the top of a bush, and bob their heads at you as you pass by. It is but a deprecatory if not deferential acknowledgment of your presence, and it is more kindly to take it as a greeting than as a so-called act of mockery. They are uncertain of their ground in the superior presence of man, and do not know how he may regard them.

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Ostriches of the Karroo.

And after the treatment that is commonly served out to them, I am surprised that they are still so tame, and yet more than half willing to trust us. They labour ceaselessly in our interest in catching the countless flies and other insects which they devour. We have also the little Chameleon with his famous coat of many changing colours. For him I reserve a special chapter further on, as he is well deserving of it.

PART IV

ANIMAL LIFE (*continued*)

BIRDS

WE now rest our eyes on the birds of the earth, and raise them to the fowl of the air. The towering Ostrich, for his size and importance, heads the list. He has been domesticated, and is farmed for his fine and valuable feathers. Fortunes have been made, but more lost, in the industry. The uses of the feathers are subject to the caprices of fashion, and, with over production, the market becomes glutted, and a slump ensues. The chief difficulty is to regulate this business; but in the fifty years of its life, a way has not yet been found. The great bird still roams the plains in his wild state. His flesh is not bad eating, and when the feather market becomes impossible, it is replaced to some extent by butcheries for the sale of ostrich meat! The eggs of the hen-bird make a capital omelet. I shall not describe the bird, as you have all seen him, either alive or in pictures. It is not true that he buries his eggs in the sand for the sun to hatch out, though this is asserted in school-books that are in use. The hen sits on them, and occasionally the cock-bird takes a turn, while she has a run and "gets a bite." He mostly sits at night, when his black feathers render him invisible in the darkness. Nor is it correct that he thrusts his head into the sand, or into the bush, when danger threatens, and thus becomes an easy prey to the hunter. No! he avails himself of his powerful limbs, and who can overtake him then may have him for his pains; but he will take some catching. Lastly, he is not used as a draught animal, and as for his being handy as a "saddle-horse," you may take the saddle off the bird and put it on the ass that said so! Men young and old, come from England at this day and believe these things. And they believe other monstrosities and absurdities that are still read and taught.

Next, let us consider the "Gom Paauw"—*Gumpow*—the largest of our bustards. He is as big as a very large turkey, but of stouter build, and he may even scale eighty pounds in weight. He is found among the high bush, and on the edge of the tree belts, where the mimosa *exudes its gum*. His size has rendered him comparatively rare, he is an easy mark, and a splendid table-bird. His smaller brother, the ordinary "Paauw," is the size of a goose and is frequently seen, half a dozen or more of them together sometimes. He also is excellent eating.

Then there is the "Knorhaan"—*Grumbling Cock*, so named from the grumbling sounds he emits, like a querulous old man. He is the Cape Gurnet, and is as large as a fowl. His voice is ventriloquial, so that, when you may judge by his call, that he is only two hundred yards away, he may be a full mile distant. Of them we have many. They are most tenacious of life. I have seen them fly off with the rear half of the body shot away. They are both tough and lean, but they make a savoury stew. Next comes the "Bont-Knorhaan"—*Spotted-Knorhaan*—a lively, sprightly bird. He will rise suddenly and unexpectedly straight and high up in the air, with a continuous and harsh, metallic-like cackling, till he drops back to earth and runs off. He is fleet, and will dodge you in a wonderful way. Finally he will squat and lie perfectly still, and then you may as well give him up. You must shoot him on the wings if you want him. He is good eating, but is little bigger than a bantam fowl.

The stately Stanley-Crane is common. Big as he looks, he is no larger, when stripped, than a fowl. He is said to be good eating; but I have not tasted him myself. We have many Doves; but the "Bushdove," for his size, is the only one worth troubling about. The others are the "Ringdove," the "Turtle-Dove" and the "Namaqua Dove," all pretty birds that liven up the valleys with their pleasant musical calls.

We also have Pheasants in a few wooded parts. The "Namaqua Partridge," the "Mountain Partridge," and the Plover are plentiful, and all are good table-birds. The "Crested Peewit," or Lapwing, is not uncommon; but he is rather small.

The Quail has become comparatively rare. " Guinea-Fowl " used to occur in remoter parts, in the bush and trees near the watercourses.

On the plains we have larger and smaller kinds of Larks; but their numbers have sadly dwindled. Nine-tenths of them have disappeared during the past half century. When I was a little boy, I heard the sky-larks sing in the Karroo; but the droughts have killed them off, or driven them away to kindlier regions. Since the time that the great drought of 1877 destroyed nearly all our larks, the continued depredations of the " Secretary Bird " and the " Sparrow Hawk " have made it impossible for these useful little birds to recover their numbers. And so the " Rispers "—*Caterpillars*—and other insect pests get the upper hand. They invade and destroy our gardens, our lands, and the veld, and we think that we are hardly used. And if the evil, yet necessary droughts did not in their turn again destroy the insects, we should hardly be able to farm at all.

PART V

ANIMAL LIFE (*continued*)

BIRDS (*continued*)

REFERRING briefly to the water-birds, there are the " Wild Goose," two sorts of Duck, the " Water Hoender "—*Water Hen* or Rail, the little " Diver " (a diminutive duck), and the slender-limbed " Avocet," with its long, graceful, curved beak. All are excellent birds for the table. Among the waders are the "Stork," the "Heron," and the remarkable "Hammerkop"—*Hammer-head* or umbrette, for his head with its tuft looks exactly like a hammer in shape. This last is plain brown, is the size of a fowl, and builds a huge nest of sticks, four feet high, leaning outwards, on the edge of a projecting cliff. The interior of the nest, which is mounted on top of the stack of sticks, is capacious enough to hold a large dog, is rounded, and is plastered with clay, and has a commodious entrance. Long, long ago I scaled a cliff to get at one of these extraordinary nests, and with great difficulty managed to extract four brown eggs, the size of a guinea-fowl's. With patient effort I also removed the eggs and myself to safety. The hammerkop has a pleasant twitter. All the other larger water-birds have discordant cries.

Before we leave the waterside, I will name the "Snipe," and the wide awake and cheery little "Sand Piper." The gorgeous and aptly named "King Fisher" frequents the river pools, and in the banks he burrows his home, that he lines out neatly with the bones of the fish whose flesh he has devoured. He repays watching, but you will require all your art, for he is shy and alert, and he has piercingly sharp eyes. Wonderful is his lightning dart and dive when he takes the fish from the water, and is instantly gone out of sight again. The common Wag-tail runs along the edges of the pools, and through the kraals, snapping up, with a sound like a crack of a small whip, the little flies that linger near the surfaces. He puts his trust in man, and makes his nest in the walls of the buildings. He is very tame, but his confidence is sometimes betrayed, and he is cruelly murdered by badly-trained boys and men. The coloured people and the Hottentots venerated him and the swallow, and said that you would invoke the wrath of God if you destroyed them. And were they wrong? In our wicked carelessness and indifference we upset the balance of nature. The flies and the mosquitoes carry disease and death, the insects eat our crops, the caterpillars ravage the veld, and we are heavily penalized. The droughts supervene with two-fold severity, as the herbage is already devoured. The disregard of Nature's laws enforces its own punishment, and will exact the uttermost farthing. Our Agricultural Department and Societies do not pay much heed to these trifles!

Of the smaller birds we number many varieties, some of brilliant and gaudy plumage, besides a few sweet songsters, though our reputation may not run to it. But when ignorance asserts itself, it takes ready hold, and is hard to uproot. Among our swallow kind are the beautifully plumaged "Bee-eaters," as large as turtle doves. You may see a score or more together, on the wing, or perched on the taller trees calling prettily to each other. They burrow their nests in the high sandbanks that mark the great watercourses. The pretty "Pencil-breast" and the little steel-blue and black "House Swallow" are so tame that you may almost touch them, and they build their clay nests inside our dwelling. The "House Martin" also erects his clay structure beneath the eaves, and the "Sand-Martin" burrows in a numerous company near the bee-eaters. The common "Swift" abounds, and cleaves the air with the sharp, hissing rush of his flight, at a speed of 200 miles an hour, upwards. He is more than worthy of his name, for he is the *swiftest* of all our flying birds, great or small. A colony of them build together on the under surface of a smooth rock, at a safe height from the ground. Their nests open into one another, and are made of wool, strongly woven, and fortified with a gluey substance. Their congregational manner of nest architecture reminds one of the weaver-birds of the interior. Occasionally, however, a pair of swifts will turn the pencil-breasts out of their nests, built on the outside of a house, at an unfrequented spot, and thus save themselves time and trouble.

The gaudy but voracious "Jay" is still one of ours; but he has become rare. Of Chats are the large "Black Chat," the "Common Chat," the "Little Brown Chat," and the "Stonechat." The last has also been wrongly named the "Nightingale," which he resembles only in appearance. He is a wonderful mimic, and faithfully imitates the cries of other animals and birds. The merry "Streep Kopje"—*Striped Head*—is also a pleasant presence.

Of the birds that worry the orchards are the cunning and persistent "Blackcap" and the "Muisvogel"—*Mousebird*—a parrakeet that will eat six times his weight in a day. The *fruit-eating* "Spreeuw" with the shiny coat like burnished steel, and the little "Glaasoogie"—*Glass eye*—both take a heavy toll. The cosmopolitan Sparrows present themselves in more than welcome numbers. And they all exact tribute, well nigh stripping the isolated gardens. The remedy should be a multiplication of orchards, that there might be enough for bird and man. I would destroy the " muisvogel " that lives on fruit, and in no way pays for what he takes, and that is also exceedingly voracious. I would hardly spare the blackcap, but the " spreeuws " and the " glaasoogies " are another matter. It might be advisable to check their numbers. The sparrows should be preserved, for they feed their young entirely on grubs, and thus consume an inconceivable number of insect pests. The crack of an ox-wagon whip, or the occasional discharge of a gun, will scare off the birds from a large land or orchard during the few weeks of ripening. Birds should not lightly be destroyed. We require their aid to keep down the insects and caterpillars, so that we may be able to grow and rear our grain and fruit-crops, and that the veld may be preserved.

PART VI

ANIMAL LIFE (*continued*)

BIRDS (*continued*)

THE lively " Blackbird " haunts the mimosa belts. You hear his cheery " tweet-tweet," but he does not sing. The recurrent droughts give him a hard time. In beautiful England, where water is plentiful, and the soft earth readily yields up its worms and grubs, the thrush and the blackbird toil for a couple of hours and get enough. Then they sit upon the boughs and sing and whistle their content. In the waterless, sun-baked Karroo, the music of these tender-beaked birds is subdued. It survives in the strong-billed Cape Canary and the hardy little Reed Sparrow, both of which are kin to the common sparrow, and do not depend so much on the earth itself for sustenance. These are sweet songsters, though the Cape canary only sings in captivity, and we are justly proud of them. The perky though shy "Robin," the counterpart of his English brother, dwells near the blackbird, but dives deeper into the thickets. The hard struggle for existence has likewise robbed him of his song.

The beautiful "Sugar Bird," or "Honeysucker" as some call him, frequents the bush on the banks of the large dry channels and the wooded mountain kloofs. The male is gorgeous, with brilliant, shiny-green feathers and flowing tail, but the female dons her short and modest drab dress the year round. How prettily they hover before the flowers, their long, curved bills thrust within, sucking up the sweetness!

The little "Mocking Bird," that numbers two species, is noted for his mimicry. He cleverly imitates or *mocks* the other birds; but he is harmless and useful, feeding entirely on insects. The remarkable and watchful "Katlacher"—*Laugher at Cats*—discloses the presence of cats or snakes. Many a snake have I killed, of whose whereabouts he has informed me. The small Fly-catchers that take the flies so marvellously and build elegant cup-shaped nests, move along the river banks.

The alert "Bok-ma-kierie"—*Buck-with-a-stick*—cheerily heralds the approach of man. He has various vigil calls, and his mate promptly responds with a different note that yet harmonizes strangely. He is twice the size of a sparrow, and his general colouring is light-brown and yellow. "Bok-bok-ma-kierie" cries the male. "Wee-wee," "wee-wee" ("*yes-yes*," "*yes-yes*") answers his lady in the distance!

The diminutive "Kapokvogeltje"—*Snowbird*—weaves his covered, oval nest of *snow-white* wool. Immediately below the spout-like entrance is a larger decoy door, for the snakes, that leads into a closed passage. As a snake attempts to get in, the pressure of his body closes the small entrance above, and completes the security of the inmates. The space of the lower door is otherwise occupied as a roosting-place by the male bird, while the female hatches her eggs within.

Of the delicate "Klap-klapjes"—*little Flap-flaps*,—named from the smart flapping of their wings—there are three species. They lay pretty, speckled eggs, in their comfortable nests of grass and wool, some blue with dark specks, and others white with reddish specks. The tiny "Rooibekjes"—*little Red-Beaks*—with their brilliant red bills, are plentiful. They build large, covered nests of grass, with long, tube-like entrances, projected slantingly downwards in a way to foil the snakes. Several females may lay in the same nest, which may then contain as many as sixteen little white eggs. Occasionally they build a smaller hooded nest on the top of the larger ones as a roosting-place for the males.

The hardy, strong-beaked yellow "Finch" may be seen wherever there is water. He likes company, and weaves his graceful symmetrical nest of grass on the weeping-willow branches that overhang the streams and pools, working away among his chattering comrades likewise engaged. In the absence of water or willows, they will hang their nests on the taller trees at a greater height. You may have seen this on the fir-tree branches at Cape Town. There are two species, including our gallant, brown Bullfinch, which latter builds a cup-shaped nest in a tree, and is also a sweet singer in captivity. Of the shy sharp-eyed Woodpeckers, we number two species. Both of them are gay-feathered.

With pardonable pride we may add the beautiful "Hoopoe." Mark him as he rises and pursues his fine, curvetting flight, and when he alights, you may hear his musical "hoop-hoop-hoop!" afar. With crest erect, he punctuates each third note by a graceful bend of the neck, as he touches the bough on which he sits with the tip of his beak. But he is bigamous, and I have taken seven eggs, the joint product of his two wives, from their nest in the hollow of a tree, near the ground. The eggs are a whitish brown and have remarkably thick shells. They likewise lay in a cavity in a bank, in the ground, or in a dunghill.

We also have the "Night Jar"—sans neck, sans legs. His wide, bristled beak cleaves his head in halves, and seems to open right into his interior. His legs are so brief that his feet appear to grow out of his belly. If he descends on a bough, he lies along its length, for he cannot perch. His queer, continuous, rousing note, that sounds like the burr of some huge insect, suggests that he is very long-winded! His lady deposits her two strangely mottled eggs on the ground, in the seclusion of a thick group of trees.

The unworthy "Butcher-bird" that so worthily bears his evil name is an unwelcome resident. His harsh and dreary notes are fitted to the bloody trade that he so ruthlessly plies. He is an unsparing slayer of the lesser birds and the larger insects, and impales them on the big mimosa thorns, to be devoured at his leisure. I have even seen this bold buccaneer enter the hawks' nests and murder the young while the parent birds were away getting them food. I actually drove one from a falcon's nest, and rescued a solitary little hawk bleeding from two wounds that had been inflicted on his head. His companions had probably been slain previously, as the falcon lays four eggs. I carried the little one home, but after feeding him for two weeks, he died of gluttony. This was the result of my anxiety that he should not starve! We have the larger and the smaller butcher-bird. The latter is a little bigger than a sparrow, but the former is twice as large.

The cheery, chirpy, chattery and exceedingly lively little "Tomtit" heralds his arrival, and proclaims the potent power of spring with no uncertain sound. His appearance and manner suggest an animated though minimized edition of the cock-sparrow. Deep down in the depths of a loosely-built stone wall, by many a devious corkscrew twist and turn, or in the bowels of a pile of stones, he finds a convenient cavity for his woolly nest. And if you want his four little precious and jealously guarded eggs, you will first have to remove the shielding region of his rocky rampart.

The gaudily spotted and gaily bespeckled "Nieuwejaar's Vogel"—*New Year bird*, or Cuckoo with flowing tail—that raises the very dickens as he cries his credentials, from the denser and upper foliage of tree and thicket, in loud and piercing shrieks, marking a strange contrast to his relative of the English woods who makes such soft, sweet and soothing music—is another presence, with his rousing notes, to stir the sluggish blood and urge man to be up and doing. He arrives in time for the Christmas holidays. The last to come and the first to go, he has no time for family affairs. His wife lays her roundish, white eggs in a handy nest, the architecture of other and honest birds, and these deluded victims cheerfully adopt and zealously care for the wicked brood of a gross imposture.

PART VII

ANIMAL LIFE (*continued*)

BIRDS (*continued*)

LET us now raise our eyes to the tree tops. There we may find the nest of the "Rook" with its four pretty, speckled eggs; also that of the "Falcon" already mentioned; likewise of the beautifully marked but predatory "Blue-Hawk." In an isolated tree you will see the home of the "Secretary Bird," the ungainly, long-legged hawk that struts with impudent dignity on the plains, and presents such a highly respectable and even striking appearance. He became famous by killing a snake or two, and bluffed our patriarchal Government into the bestowal of the mighty order of "Hands off!" which he undeservedly bore for a period of sixty years, and still bears in the Karroo! Blessed and shielded in immunity till some three years ago in the Transvaal was this Prince of tyrants, the slayer of hares, young game-birds, larks, countless useful lizards, and occasionally one of the few snakes that was still pursuing its endeavours to keep the plague of mice in subjection. Also in isolation, but higher up, you may discover the house of the "Kauw-vogel"—*Chewing*, or *Devouring Bird*?—one of the larger eagles, that all lay two eggs. His swoop when he takes a hare or a knorhaan is a marvellous sight. In the tops of still higher trees you may look upon the palace of the "White-bellied Eagle," also a bird of goodly proportions. Keep gazing upward and you will see the dwelling of the "Black Vulture," who is not so degraded as his lousy white brothers, whom he both dominates and despises, and prefers his own company.

Now we will away to the great mountain range that provides refuge to the ghoulish crew, and suitable accommodation to the denizens of nobler blood. There the "Aasvogels"—*Carrion-birds*—used to breed in many hundreds; but they have almost disappeared by reason of the careless poisoning of carcases with intent to destroy the jackals. There also, in splendid isolation, each couple on their own lonely crag, the lordly eagles of the rocks establish themselves, for the great precipices extend for miles, and there is room for all. The "Berghaan"—the *Mountain Cock*; the "Lammer Fanger"—Lamb Catcher; the "Hoender Jager"—*Fowl Chaser* or hen harrier, and the "Jakhals Vogel"—*Jackal Bird*—all flourish in the security of their fortress homes, and are free and happy in their remote eyries. There they dwell where none may enter or molest, and from there they sally forth to work their will upon the subject creatures of the earth below. The stately "Raven" also finds a lonely spot, and the "Bush-dove," already mentioned, seeks shelter in the lower rocks, at the head of the great kloofs or ravines. The common "Horned Owl" secures a ledge further down, but he is more at home among the trees and on the banks of the dry rivers. The "Barn Owl" is now seldom seen, and the shy little "Brown Owl" does not show himself much. That most elegant of fliers, the "Kite," sails gracefully o'er hill and plain, and also finds lodgment in the rocks. He hovers near the homesteads on the lookout for little chicks and ducklings, or for scraps of meat. The Dutch appropriately name him "Kuiken Dief"—*Chicken Thief*. He is a smaller member of the eagle tribe, and like them he swoops down upon his prey. There are two kinds in the Karroo, and both have strikingly forked tails.

A most tireless bird on the wing is the little "Sparrow Hawk," that is always on the move over the lesser ranges and the valleys, pouncing upon and preying upon the small birds and the young of the game birds. His depredations are proportionately as great as those of the secretary bird, but no one worries about it or even seems to notice it. He nests in the higher banks and rocks, and chooses an inaccessible spot.

I have named you many scores of the different sorts of animals and birds in the Karroo, also a large number of reptiles. I have not said much of them, nor told you of all. When last you, who say that you have seen it, rushed through the arid country, and looked across the dreary plains of drab bushes, or gazed upon the naked, brown-stone hills—could you have deemed it possible that those dead regions held so much life? But there are still myriad small dwellers of the earth and the air, and many creatures of the water in that thirsty land! Let us pass on and briefly examine.

Part VIII

ANIMAL LIFE (*continued*)

FISH, TURTLES, ETC.

In our river pools are many fish, and three several kinds. Two we do not eat, because they are no larger than white-bait, though they may be good. The bigger sort does not grow above ten inches in length, and is known as the "Klipspringer"—*Rock-leaper*. He jumps a height of six feet out of the water. He is an exceedingly swift and strong swimmer, and always travels upstream, ever in search of the mysterious source. He is shaped like a salmon; but his flesh is the whitest of any fish, and is almost luxuriously delicate. Freshwater turtles abound, and are plentiful in the pools and many of the larger dams. They should be good to eat; but we have not been educated up to it! The Crabs grow to a fair size—half a pound or more in weight. Some navvies who worked on our farm cooked a few in a pot and ate them. They boiled nice and red and looked quite appetizing. There are a multitude of frogs, and several species. Their nightly concerts may be appreciated after the ear has becomed attuned to them! Toads are also innumerable where there is any dampness. The waters and their haunts also claim countless beetles, spiders, dragon flies and other insects.

PART IX

ANIMAL LIFE (*continued*)

BEETLES

LET us now regard the army of Beetles—those that fly, and others that only walk. Of the magnificent "Stag-Beetles" with sheathed wings, we have several species, some of them brilliantly marked, and with long, graceful antennæ sweeping back with majestic curve from the top of the head to beyond the length of the body. The stag-beetle of Europe is entirely different. The "Scarabæus," the sacred beetle of the ancient Egyptians, abounds. There is the larger black and the smaller golden species. Wonderfully alert, and always in a state of tireless activity and great hurry, they wing their unerring way to the fresh dung of an animal, run up, cut off a portion with their hard, serrated head, quickly knead it into a perfectly round ball with their strong, rough, horny feet, then pressing their two front legs against the ground, and grasping the ball with the extremities of the remaining four, they trundle it backwards at a great rate, till they reach a suitable burrowing place, generally beside a stone, or beneath a scrubby bush. Then, in the same feverish hurry, they dig their holes, scooping out the earth with the serrated and shovel-shaped head, and pushing it to the surface with the feet and the body. In less than half an hour they attain a depth of eight inches, when they roll the ball in and down to the bottom. In the centre of this ball of dung they deposit their eggs. The little ones hatch out, and gradually eat their way to freedom. But the scarabæus has to fight his battles. In the course of his trundling, or before he can dispose of his ball, an adversary often presents himself to dispute possession. A terrific combat ensues. The owner promptly mounts the ball. The claimant attempts to dislodge the occupant from the point of vantage; but after a few passes the latter hooks his serrated head beneath his opponent's shovel, and with a sudden jerk, sends him spinning backwards to a distance of ten inches. The baffled one picks himself up and advances again, the lawful possessor awaiting the onslaught in a state of furious excitement and in sparring attitude, his forelegs whirling like pistons. The second round is generally a repetition of the first, and the discomfited warrior retires. I have seen them knock great holes in each other's shells, and as these are very hard, it proves their prodigious strength.

Something like the stag-beetle in shape, but slenderly built, is the "Spanish Fly"; but he has a pungent, penetrating odour that some people prize, but which was always too much for me, and others are welcome to it!

The beautiful "Cockchafer" in his armour of iridescent green, relieved by the pretty white lines near the edges of his flat body, infests the almond trees. But in the absence of the latter, he wings his way to the mimosas and the acacias.

The large, wingless, hard-shelled "Squirting Beetles," with formidable jaws, are numerous, and present three several specimens. On your approach, at a distance of nine feet, they squirt a fiery liquid into your eyes, that nearly blinds at the time, nauseates with an overpowering odour, the effects of which may be felt for three days later.

The "Toptopje"—*Tap-tapper*, because he taps or raps his signals to his mate—is worthy of remark. At night you may hear him in your room rapping on the floor as loudly as one may do with the knuckles. The ignorant believers in ghosts have been badly scared by the uncanny experience. This beetle has a round, hard, black shell, the size of a walnut, and supported on long legs, by which he raises and brings down his body to effect his signalling. He is a creeper and cannot fly. I saw a scorpion seize one and crush it with its pincers—another proof of the extraordinary strength many of these smaller creatures possess!

PART X

ANIMAL LIFE (*continued*)

BEETLES, SCORPIONS AND SPIDERS

THE large, repulsive "Korenkriekje"—*Corn-Cricket*—with his round, spiky, cold, reptilian body, the size of a billiard ball, but rough as the skin of a toad, and with long, slender antennæ, lingers around the house, and climbs up the walls. He also squirts a disagreeable fluid when touched. He is a wine-bibber, and if you put out a saucer of sweet wine he will indulge until he cannot get away, and will lie besotted on the ground, unless, as a kind friend, you see him home!

Of the flying "Doortje"—*Dorothy*—there are several species of this beetle, some with wings sheathed under shells like burnished copper and all with hairy legs, while others are armoured in sober drab and brown. Why named *Dorothy* I cannot tell, unless, in elastic imagination, you may hear her sweet song as she drones along in her flight; but it would be a bit of a stretch!

Scorpions are many, and their tribes are two.

They are both venomous, the large red-brown, and the big, black, broad-stinged one, that makes a sound like the rasp of an iron file with the joints of his armour, as he stalks fiercely past, all ready to do battle when he is disturbed. Black he is and carries black death in his sting, and his mien is exceedingly ferocious. Yet the Tarantula is his match and slays him easily!

Spiders are countless, and number even their variety by the score. The large, scaly, deadly Tarantula, master of the scorpion, is one, and the still bigger and equally venomous "Baviaan Spinnekop"—*Baboon Spider*, because he is dark and the baboons eat him—is another. The latter has a burrow beside and under a small boulder. It is as large as a mousehole, and is lined out with cobweb. There is the long hairy one that runs as fast as a man's walk, and the scaly, strong-jawed one, that burrows his smooth, straight vertical hole in the level "brakpan," and fits it with a perfect hinged lid, that he closes down after him when he enters. And if the rains come and beat upon that house, and the waters pass over it and prevail a cubit upwards, yet is he as safe and dry as ever was Noah in the Ark, and without his accumulated and multifarious responsibilities. Of the meeker kind is the timid, harmless old "Daddy Longlegs" who lives indoors, but apologizes and runs on every disturbance, and is in deadly fear of the broom and the mop. There are the Weaving spiders—the spiders with inviting parlours, the Flying spiders, the Water spiders, the Sailor spiders, the Gossamer spiders, the Velvet spiders, the Pink spiders, the Red spiders, the Green spiders, the Brown spiders, the Black spiders, the Spotted spiders and their kind, the spiders that fight and the spiders that run, the Long-legged spiders, the Short-legged spiders, the Lean spiders, the Plump spiders, the spiders that make nests, the spiders that build houses with doors, the whole great army of spiders, for their name is Legion! I omitted the money-spider, said to bring luck. The Four-wheeled spider suggests itself; but it belongs to another kingdom!

LOCUSTS, GRASSHOPPERS AND THE MANTIS

The Locusts and the Grasshoppers are a host as to variety alone. First, is the common flying locust, whom we regard with interest and anxiety because he eats seven times his weight in a day, and because there are so many. When he is yet young and tender, a mere "Voetganger"—*Foot-ganger*, or goer on foot—hops along in a mighty company, and sleeps at night among dense masses of his comrades, then we are upon him at break of day with the deadly spray. And very attenuated and ragged are the ranks as they resume their march when the sun grows warm—a poor, sorry remnant. On the "Milk Bushes" are the brilliantly hued locusts. If you try to take them, they exude a disagreeable, foul-smelling slime, like soap-suds, from beneath their wings, and compel you to turn away in disgust. They are lazy, and would rather drive you away than be driven off by you. The Grasshoppers are too many to attempt a detailed specification, and space will not permit. There are the long, slender, graceful and elegantly shaped varieties. You will find them green in the young barley field and white in the ripe corn, though they be twin brothers. Like the chameleon, they change their coats; but their toilet is slow, and they do in an hour what takes him but a few minutes. And yet they travel at fifty times his pace! Among the brown bushes dwell the squat, thick-limbed ones, that look like the dead stones, but become animated, and startle you when they hop a long yard away at the touch.

A reminder of the graceful grasshopper in his slender build and his varied green and white is the wonderful Mantis—the Hottentot God—with his large, bulging, splendid eyes. He has a thin elegant waist and a slender supple neck, so that he may turn his head to look every way. He always raises his forelegs as if in the act of prayer, or of bestowing a benediction. He is a herald of the thunder-showers, and his welcome presence is accepted as such. He counts but a modest three tribes, two of which are uncommon.

CRICKETS, MOTHS, BUTTERFLIES

The Cricket (of the hearth) abounds, and you hear his cheerful chirp the long summer through. There is also the red, burrowing Cricket, that sits before his hole and sings his continuous piercing note after sundown and on till late in the evening.

Let us finally regard the softer flying insects. Here also is a vast and wide field; but we will just take a peep here and a brief look there, lest we linger and get lost. Of Moths and Butterflies there are very many, great and small, some more or less harmless, but a few exceedingly destructive. Prominent is the large Spotted Moth with beautiful, feathered antennæ, a furry body, parent to the huge, green-and-black-spotted, hairy caterpillar, that destroys the mimosa. The dreaded Codlin-Moth, an undesirable importation of the late years, is the despair of the orchards. The little Greyish-brown Moth of the Karroo bushes comes in millions and breeds in countless millions the devastating "Rispers"—*Caterpillars*—which crawl along and cover the face of the earth, utterly destroying the green herbs as they go, moving in masses across the railways and holding up the traffic! For they render the way slippery with their mangled bodies, and the wheels of the engine fail to grip the greasy rails. Yet there are many beautiful and harmless specimens of moths and butterflies; but we will not stop to collect, though I must mention the pretty caterpillar that carries his house with him as he goes. His dwelling is a sack of tough parchment, to which are glued little sticks and stones. He protrudes the frontal body and walks on his forelegs, dragging his habitation after him. When disturbed, he instantly withdraws into the sack and closes the mouth of it. Covered with the sticks and stones, his fortress is secure in its invisibility!

MOSQUITOES, FLIES, BEES, WASPS, CENTIPEDES, ETC.

Mosquitoes number two kinds. The larger venture out boldly and attack you while the sun is warm. The smaller come when it is dark, they go to bed with you, get under the blankets if you pull them over your head, and bite you still. They torment you till checked by the chill of dawn. Gnats there are too, but you will scarcely notice them after the mosquitoes.

Flies are innumerable in the summer time, and "Bottle Flies"—*Blue Bottles* as they are misnamed—are a multitude. Some of the latter have brilliant hues; but there are no *blue* blue-bottles. All these flies are useful scavengers, and we should suffer seriously and pay dearly if they were quite removed. They are also the chief food supply of many small birds and reptiles.

Honey-bees, and Wasps especially, are numerous. I know but of three varieties of honey-bees in the Karroo. I have read that there are eighty species in England. I cannot believe it! I think varieties when they differ widely are often mistaken for *species* by the naturalists. There is the long, elegant, slender-waisted house-wasp. Very friendly and amiable he is so long as he is not interfered with. He captures large spiders and caterpillars, paralysing them with his sting. There are several other kinds with resplendent colours, burnished and iridescent.

Among the remarkable crawling insects is the many-legged Centipede, that really does not crawl, for he runs with speed, and you must hurry if you would not lose him; also the wonderful and finely shaped "Duizendpoot"—*Thousand foot* or Millepede—with a maze of legs, and yet how uniformly and without confusion they move, as he glides smoothly over the ground. His kind comes forth in multitudes after the soaking rains, and they walk in the cool of the morning and in the late afternoon, when the heat of the sun has departed. The scorching rays of noon would kill them. Like the snails and the slugs who also keep us company, they like the cool and the damp.

There are myriads of Ants, and many species. The large Brown Termite, known as the "Rijst Mier"—*Rice Ant*—is a feature; also the small "White Ant" Termite—that dwells in his mound on the mountains where there is grass—these termites are not *ants*.

Part I

PLANT LIFE OF THE KARROO

So much for what the biologist terms the *fauna* of the Karroo. Now just a short word about the *flora*. I cannot tackle it in serious detail. It is too vast and full of technicalities. Nearly fifty years ago, a certain Professor Cameron came to South Africa to make a botanical survey. Our second tutor, mentioned on previous pages, opened up a correspondence with him. This resulted in our assisting to collect specimens of every growing tree, shrub or plant, in the blossoming or flowering stage when possible, and pressing and drying them between the leaves of books. When ready, they were carefully packed off to the Professor at Cape Town. He duly classified them and sent us back a spare specimen or two of each kind, labelled with formidable Greek and Latin names. Ultimately we had a big volume containing many hundreds of specimens, with grandiloquent titles (at least they sounded so !), and very fine and beautiful they looked. Nothing could have been more surprising and pleasing. And to think that they were all products of the arid Karroo where we had lived the whole of our lives ! Anyone, not knowing otherwise, would have thought that they had been gathered in the most fertile and verdant fields, and had come from the fairest parts of the earth.

On the banks and near the dry watercourses, the " Mimosa " flourishes. Goats and sheep feed eagerly on the leaves and seed pods. The trees are useful as firewood, and the thorn branches are handy for making kraals or garden enclosures. The thorns grow in pairs, reminding one of the horns of an ox, and, like them, I have seen some of these thorns elegantly curved, each spike being upwards of 8 inches long and of proportionate girth. The clusters of golden yellow blossom at midsummer are good to see, and the fragrance is pleasant. In the sandy kloofs, at the base of the hills and mountains, the " Karree Tree " thrives. It has a good spread, and the leaves are a refreshing and pleasing green, the acid berries turning from green to yellow as they ripen, and lending an added charm. The wood makes excellent charcoal, and the trunks are valued as fencing-posts on account of their durability. The bark is also very good for tanning skins and hides. A kind of wild poplar (in appearance) grows in isolated spots in the hollows on the mountain-sides, where a fountain or any dampness occurs. Out on the plains, where large pools are formed when the rain falls, you may see a " Blaauwbosch "—*Blue Bush*—or two. The foliage is fairly thick, and the spread of the branches thus yields a grateful shade. It bears a remarkable berry, larger than a coffee-bean, containing a glutinous substance. Along the lower banks of the water-courses, occur patches of jungle composed of the " Taaibosch "—*Tough-bush.* It has leaves like the quince, and berries very similar to those of the Karree Tree, and likewise acid, but they turn from green to red as they mature. Scattered among the mimosa you may find the " Wolvedoorn "—*Wolf Thorn*—really a large-sized shrub, of a rich, pleasing green. Its wood is soft, and the rough bark favours the harbouring of insects. It is therefore much patronized by the wood-peckers who dig out their nesting-places in the trunks, and pick out the concealed grubs and beetles for food.

Among the taller alkaline shrubs, is the " Gannabosch "—*Lyebush*—with small, crisp, rich green leaves. It flourishes in the deep, brackish soil, is drought resisting, and is nourishing food for the sheep and the goats. It is burnt for the sake of its ashes. The " Litjesbosch " was likewise treated and yielded the best ash. It is an articulated, creeping shrub, as the name suggests, with a profusion of small, watery leaves. The ashes were leached, and the caustic solution, known as " Loog "—*Lye*—was used in making the " Boer Soap." Another large alkaline plant, that grows with the " Ganna," is the " Brakbosch "—*Brackbush*—to which the animals are not quite so partial. Then there is the variety of " Ice-plants "—" Koudgoed " or *Cold-goods*—the " Mesembryanthemum " (*Midday Flowering*) of the botanists. Most of them bear pretty flowers—pink, purple, white, and yellow—some with envelopes like frosted glass, and they have delicate, cool, watery leaves, composed almost entirely of alkaline sap. In low-lying tracts (by the river channels) that are submerged in the floods, grow dense patches of the dark, dreary, flimsy " Inkbush," a tall, unstable, dry-looking, alkaline shrub, with small, dark leaves that nothing eats. On the ends of the twigs perch crowds of bushticks, with fore-legs extended in readiness to grab hold of any animal that may happen to brush past. The tops of the Brakbosch are also the chosen waiting-places of these pests, and they will watch and wait for days.

Out on the plains grow a variety of bushes and herbs that make grazing for the small stock. The " Schaapbosch," or *Sheepbush*, is the chief of these. It bears little, round, golden-yellow buds, and has a rich aroma. It dips its branches into the ground, where they again take root, and is also propagated by its seed. In good seasons, therefore, it makes rapid headway. The " Vijgebosch "—*Figbush*—is the quickest to recover from a drought. Its black, and apparently dead twigs, will be covered with green leaves a day or two after the rain, and the pinkish purple flowers, that match it so well, follow quickly. The "Granaatbosch," or *Pomegranate Bush,* is another marvellous example. Within a week after the rain, its tall, tough, bare sticks are a mass of pretty, pale yellow blossoms, with the green leaves developing at the same time. It grows in the stony, shallow ground, and in the thin soil overlying the limestone.

Cactus plants flourish on the hills, and in the stony soil of the plains, and there are several varieties. They are all armed with protective spiky thorns. They are useful to feed the animals in a drought; but the thorns must first be scorched off over a blazing fire. This is quickly done. One of the smaller kind, called the "Gaap" by the Hottentots, is edible. It has a sweetish-bitter taste, and is quite wholesome. The most notable cactus, however, is the "Prickly Pear," of the candelabra style, that bears the delicious, oval-shaped fruit, the size of a hen's egg, on the edges of its large, flat, cool, fleshy, green leaves. Though the fruit contains a mass of small, hard, flat seeds, it is juicy, sweet, refreshing, wholesome, and strengthening. The leaves repel, with their spikes, and the fruit is covered with patches of minute, hairlike thorns, which are unpleasant if they get into your skin, and exceedingly irritating on the tongue, and not easily removed. But prevention is better than cure, and, with reasonable care, the thorns may be avoided. The fruit is covered with a thick skin which is easily removed with a knife, the thorny problem being simultaneously solved. The tree contains an abundance of refreshing sap, yet it is on record, that travellers have miserably perished of thirst, through ignorance of the fact. A rescue party actually discovered four men dead under a large Prickly Pear, that contained enough thirst-quenching liquid to have kept them alive for many days. This is true, and I can quote my authority! A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Those poor fellows did not know enough. Accompanied by a native lad, they would have been spared a needless, tragic fate. The fruit of the Prickly Pear has a fairly large flower at its extremity, while it is yet green. As it ripens, the flower which is a rich orange colour, shading off to a pale primrose, withers away. The tree is not plentiful in the Beaufort West district; but it grows increasingly as you go Eastward and South-Eastward, and in parts of the Colony, farms have been over-run and ruined by it. There is only one other flowering Cactus, and it bears a long, elegant, trumpet-like, snow-white flower, with glorious petals and fine stamens. The sight of a sugar-bird in his coat of resplendent green, hovering before this beautiful flower, and sucking up its sweetness, is worth going far to see!

The Common Aloe, with its clusters of coral-red flowers on the tall stems, abounds on the hills. The ewe-goats come home with their horns stained by the sap of the plant, which they break away to get at the flowers. They eat the latter, and it has the effect of making their milk so bitter that the kids cannot drink it, and have to go hungry. At such times the herd has to keep away from the hills to remedy matters. Much smaller and rarer is the pretty little "Kannie-Dood"—*Cannot Die* (Bot. Aloe variegata)—with its leaves marked tortoise-shell like, in green and white. It bears its flowers similarly; but they are of a rather brighter shade. If plucked up by the root, and suspended on the wall within doors, it will yet grow and flower, and hence its name. But it thrives much better on the low stony hills and ridges of its natural habitat.

The Euphorbia numbers many sorts on the plains, the low hills, and against the mountain slopes. Some kinds contain the white, milky sap that can be heated and turned into rubber. But it is not a commercial proposition. They are mostly a dreary-looking class of plant; yet they harmonize with their surroundings. Some varieties resemble cacti; but the multiple thorns are dissimilar, and the peculiar, insignificant-looking flowers are totally different.

The Crassula and Cotyledon genera number many varieties. The more conspicuous have roundish, fleshy, pale-grey, or dead-green leaves—some with vermilion borderings, and they have clusters of reddish, orange-coloured flowers, on long stems. They grow in profusion on the hills and on the mountain slopes. Other varieties differ unrecognizably from these, and from one another.

There are a few forms of the wild Pelargonium, and some have pretty red flowers.

Among the multitude of the flowering plants that spring up after the rain, and which are in general of the softer and more delicate kind, are the "Kraai

Tulp "—*Crow* (or Rook) *Tulip*—tall and graceful, that shoots up from its bulb, and bears a beautiful, purple-blue flower, like the Iris; the "Geilblom"—*Luxuriant-flower*—that occurs on the sandy soil at the foot of the hills, in large patches, the white flowers being visible a long way off; the "Goud's-blom"—*Gold-flower*—or wild Marigold; the "Boter-blom"—*Butter Flower*—a rich yellow, juicy flower that is edible, and is agreeable to the taste; the delightful little "Avondblom"—*Evening flower*—yellow, but shading to brown, that opens after sun-down, and has a very pleasant scent; also many others that are not all so prominent.

High up on the mountain slopes flourishes the tall, coarse sour-grass, with its sweet-scented, red-golden ears. *There* the little "White Ants"—*Termites*—build their large, dome-shaped homes, where they may have *straw to make bricks*.

The bush-doves fill their crops with the very hard, ripe "Dubbeltjedoorn"—*Multiplethorn*. That they can swallow it, is marvellous, and that it does not kill, or hurt them, is amazing. It is the size of a small pea, and is covered with formidable, hard, sharp spikes. It is the seed of the plant of the same name, that grows luxuriantly on the sandy soil after the rains, bearing pretty, small, yellow flowers on its long, running shoots, that are eagerly devoured by the sheep and the goats.

There are yet very many remarkable plants, and one could go on endlessly. Because of, and in spite of its aridity, the Karroo holds all these things. I think you will agree that it is all very wonderful.

PART II

PLANT LIFE (*continued*)

I AM writing without notes and without references, and drawing on memory of things seen long ago. The subject is exceedingly difficult to abridge. There is so much to say. Yet time and space demand that much must be left unsaid. I would dare to advance, that if a qualified botanist had to write a full and true record of the plant life of the Karroo, and to note everything worth recording, he could not do it in a life-time. It would require a number of volumes running into a small library. The classes of plants are very many, and the several varieties would total thousands. Some varieties would alone justify a booklet—take the prickly-pear for example. Since writing and *reading* the previous pages, I notice omissions of important plants that I cannot well pass over. I am therefore constrained to enlarge a little further, and I risk the trespass on your patience.

A beautiful vine-like creeper is the "Clematis," or "Traveller's Joy," as it is locally known. It grows near the watercourses, and overtops the "Taaibosch" and the mimosas. Its creamy-white flowers, and pretty green leaves, are indeed a grateful sight to the weary traveller.

The "Maaitjesgoed"—*Mat goods*—and "Biesjes"—*Rushes*—thrive on the damp banks of the river channels, and beside the water-pools. They are of the bulrush class, and the first, which is the coarser and stouter, is sometimes woven into rough mats, or used for building or thatching huts. Of the second, I have seen pretty small baskets made. It is tougher than the other.

I have seen no real *Cane* in the Karroo, but the Spanish Reed grows in clumps here and there amongst the Taaibosch. The stouter sort was frequently used for ceilings. The thinner kind made excellent arrows for our bows when we were lads.

On the damp, sandy river-bank grows the "Wilde Als"—*Wild Wormwood*—a bushy plant of a pleasing appearance, with delicate soft green leaves, and a pungent, but not unpleasant odour. It was boiled into a syrup by the Boers, and used as a medicine for colds and coughs. Sugar was added to counteract the bitter taste. Near it, and in greater profusion, thrives the "Truit-jy-roer-my-niet!"—*Back-you-touch-me-not!* It has a repelling odour, that is increased if the plant is shaken—hence the name. It is a large, strong-growing shrub, and bears remarkable, parchment-like pods, the size of walnuts. The pods contain a number of loose shiny-black, round seeds, like small buckshot. When the wind blows them along the river bed, the pods, with their enclosed seeds, make a rattling sound, and startle the timid stranger, especially if he happens to be there in the dark. Another companion plant is the tall "Balder-jan," of doubtful, or unprintable translation, with its tall, straight stems, and leaves somewhat resembling mint, though larger. It also has a scent, pungent and repelling; but not overpoweringly so. A sprig of it in your bedroom, when the fleas become troublesome, will speedily drive out every insect. There have been times when I was glad of the knowledge!

On the plains and mountain slopes are several bulbous plants, two or three of which are at least worth regarding for the pretty flowers they bear. Some are poisonous and injurious to stock.

The "Melkbosch"—*Milkbush*—occurs on the river-banks, in depressions where the rain-water runs, and especially on lands that are lying fallow. It is also known as the "Wild Cotton," and bears notable pods, which, when ripe, contain quantities of glossy, creamy, soft, silky material, to which cling the tiny black seeds, but it has no commercial value, because the fibre is too short. The milky sap would make rubber; but it would not repay the gathering. It is a tall, straight shrub, and the Blacks used it largely to build their huts, for which it was particularly handy. That was its only use, and it was otherwise a nuisance as a weed.

In some parts, on the alluvial river-mud banks, grows the "*Wild Tobacco*," a very tall shrub, with large, sickly-green leaves, and clusters of pale-yellowish flowers. I am told that ostriches eat it in a drought, and that it kills them. It must be fairly potent!

The "Stinkblaar"—*Stink-leaf*—keeps it company, and grows profusely in parts. It is the wild variety of the Moonflower, has purplish blue flowers, and round, thorny seed-pods, which burst and scatter innumerable flattish seeds. On many of the lands it flourishes as a weed. The large and creamy-white

"Moonflower," with beautiful stamens, and its oppressively powerful, sweet odour, is rarer, and is sometimes grown in flower gardens. It contains "Belladonna," and is injurious to the eyes if one is not careful. I used to toy with the flowers as a child. They held a sort of fascination for me, and I suspect that they were the fundamental cause of my impaired sight.

The "Rosynbosch"—*Resinbush*—grows freely on the stony ridges. It has bright-green little leaves, thickish, hard, brittle stalks, and exudes quantities of yellowish-brown resin that adheres like gum to the stems.

The "Geel Blommetje"—*Yellow Little Flower*—is found on the hills. It is a pretty, green, hardy shrub, covered with small, longish, reddish-yellow flowers, that make a powerful dye when boiled down. The coloured people used to make beautiful tobacco-pouches of a kid's or a sheep's paunch, that they prepared like a soft skin, and stained with this dye. The pouches were edged with silk facings, ornamented with bead-work, and looped with gilt cord. They were really pretty things; but have been supplanted by the modern, unattractive-looking rubber pouches.

Among the edible things that grow, is the "Kambroe" (a Hottentot word). You may find it on the plains, where there is depth of soil. It is a very small plant with a single stem, and a few small, and longish, dark-green leaves. As you dig down, the stem is found to be thicker and more succulent, till, at a depth of 8 inches, it is attached to an oval-shaped tuber, like a truffle, and as big as a fair-sized melon. This " Truffle " has a thick, brown skin, that easily peels off, and discloses a white, spongy substance, sweetish, and very juicy, pleasant to the taste and relieving to thirst. I am told that it makes a delicious preserve, and I can well believe it. Allied to this plant is the " Kankonetje "—also a Hottentot name. This grows on the hills, and has a brown tuber, the size and shape of a Spanish onion.

In the stony ground flourishes the " Eendje "—*Duckling*—that defies the drought. It is a little soft-leaved shrub, that grows flat on the ground, and bears a pretty purplish flower. At a depth of nine inches in the rocky soil, the stalk is attached to an oblongish tuber, the size of an almond with its shell. A surprising quantity of bright and golden-brownish, silky material enwraps the tuber, making the entire mass as large as a pound loaf. The tuber itself has a sweet, milky juice, is pleasant to the taste, wholesome, and exceedingly nourishing, either raw or cooked. I think the shape of the tuber suggested a little toy duck, and that it was named accordingly.

In the mixed stony and sandy soil, grows the " Haaskost "—*Hare's Food* (the Anacampseros filamentosa in botany), a small plant with little fleshy, edible, brown leaves, of a slightly acid and not unpleasant flavour. Between the leaves are a profusion of soft, delicate hairs, that should be removed before sampling the herb as a food.

A companion plant to the last named, is the " Bokkost "—*Buck's Food* (Bot. Kleinia, Radicans)—

with firm, plump, bright-green, long, pointed leaves. It runs along the ground, taking root as it goes. There is nothing remarkable in its flavour, which is pungent to a slight degree.

The " Wild Cucumber " occurs as a promiscuous weed on the homestead werf, and in the garden, where a little manure encourages its growth. It bears a tasty, appetizing fruit, oval-shaped, covered with soft spikes, and the size of a plum. It is a wild variety of the cultivated cucumber.

Of edible berries, the " Noem-Noem "—*Num-num*, signifying *nice*—flourishes on the hills between the boulders. It is a strong-growing, hard-wooded shrub, with roundish, bright green leaves, and straight, sharp thorns. When ripe, the berries are a blue-black colour—soft, juicy, and milky, and are really very nice. The " Kar-Kar Bessie "—" Kar-kar *Berry* "—keeps it company; but it is not thorny. The berry is the size of a pea, and contains a large, hard stone. When ripe they are a reddish yellow, and the thick rind, which is the edible part, has a sweet flavour.

On the skirts of the plains, and usually near the higher bush, grows a medium-sized shrub, that bears a soft berry, of a red-yellow, when ripe, and which is sweet and pleasant to the taste.

In dealing with the mountain plants, I did not mention the " Crassula Albiflora," which is conspicuous in its profusion on the higher hills, and with its compact clusters of small, white—some with an admixture of pinkish-brown—flowers, of insensible odour; but at times favoured by the wild honey-bees. I must now cry "Halt!" In a last word, I would emphasize that probably in no part of the world is there a more profuse, and a more extraordinary variety of quaint and marvellous plants than in the arid Karroo Desert. It should be a grand field for the botanical student. Take as one unique example, the "Mesem Bolusii," that looks like a stone cleft in halves. The protective form and colouring are so perfect, that unless it were in flower, you could gaze long and closely at it, and yet be sure that it was a stone. It has two plump, fleshy, greyish to brownish leaves, close together, divided from each other by a sharp cleft, out of which springs a pretty flower. This delicate flower is a worshipper of the sun, like others of its class, that spread their fine petals to the noonday blaze, to bask in the heat and light.

The wonderful "Elephant's Foot," which grows more Eastward—I have not seen it in the Karroo proper—is also worthy of special mention. It is a large, irregularly rounded mass, projecting to a couple of feet out of the stony soil, with a diameter of nearly two feet at the base. It is overspread with a rugged, oyster-shell-like pattern in bold relief. It might be taken for a worn block of hard, ancient timber, or mistaken for a queer lump of rock. No mere, normal man would suspect that it was alive! but when, from the summit, the rich green shoots spring luxuriantly forth, like the genie from the great stone jar, then once more is revealed something of the hidden mysteries of Nature, and her peerless magic.

Though the many forms differ widely, they yet approach each other closely enough in appearance in numerous cases, so that it is sometimes no easy matter to distinguish between classes, and when the endless varieties have to be considered, it becomes a task for the skilled botanist. The amateur would be lost! The remarkably apt terms that science has laboured with such pains to compile from the classical languages are a truly formidable array. One might humorously suggest that if, during the Great War, our boys at the Front had been primed with these tremendous, awe-inspiring words, to hurl as invectives at the enemy, the latter must surely have surrendered at discretion! They would have proved more effective than mere hand-grenades, and the end might have been vegetarian, speedy, and bloodless!

NATURE-SPECIMENS

Besides the botanical specimens, we made collections of crystals and other beautiful stones. This held a great fascination for me. In a space of four years, and with a world of trouble, I got together five pint-bottles of little crystals, some pure white, others golden, brown or green tinted, besides a few pretty stones, including some very small rubies. Additionally I paid for my great pains with an impaired eyesight. The stones were scattered far apart over certain areas. The method of search was to go when the sun was low, and gaze into the line of its rays with screwed-up eyes, catch the reflected light of the crystal on the ground, follow up the glint, advancing—or retreating when necessary—and moving from side to side, till you came upon the treasure. Sometimes it was a real gem, at others but a paltry specimen; and not unfrequently, it was a wicked hoax, for what flaunts its reflected glory more than a piece of broken glass? Often have I caught it up and flung it afar, without a word; but with much that was left unsaid!

My bottles have long been broken, and the precious contents, that cost so much time and labour, and such grievous sacrifice, lie scattered over the homestead grounds, or have been washed down into the river channel that runs hard by. When I look back over the weary years, how startlingly clear does that, which shines within, illuminate the mind, and the mental sight behold the scenes of long ago. How faithfully does the spirit paint upon the brain those precious memory pictures, that the eye of the soul may appraise while it is yet in the flesh! But as I grow old, and adjust my glasses to aid my poor physical sight, and think upon what has been and what might have been, what will be and what cannot be, I sigh heavily. Yet there are compensations, and on close acquaintance the Fates are not always unkind. Let it pass!

We also gathered specimens of all the smaller birds, and also of the larger ones, to the size of the smaller hawks. These we skinned with proper instruments, and preserved the skins with arsenical soap. By special request we sent them to two gentle-men—brothers—in England, who had previously visited our farm for a few weeks. But we never got the promised reward, nor anything at all beyond our pains and experience! We made a complete collection of birds' eggs, and we have them yet!

We likewise collected lizards of all kinds, and the smaller snakes, all of which we preserved in spirits. Some of them were sent to the Museum in Cape Town. Others were given to our second tutor.

Lastly, we collected beetles, moths, and butterflies, some of which were forwarded to Cape Town; but the bulk of them were taken by our tutor, just mentioned (the gentleman who was associated with the vulture-egg venture and the botanical collection), when he returned to England. My father was a staunch supporter of the Cape Town museum and a considerable contributor.

You can see, that with all these interests, with our schooling and our farming—for even then we had many small farm-duties to perform—our dogs and our hunting, we were kept going. Our lives would have held peculiar attraction for boys in England, especially in those days, and they were cast in a very different mould from that of the town boys in South Africa. We were lads of the veld and of the Karroo Farm.

I have heard people say of the Karroo, that it is dead. Others say that there is nothing there. Some declare that it is a ghastly wilderness. If again in the course of your life you should pass that way, if you will linger for a few days, to visit the farms, and go into the veld, you may see much. But you must look with *seeing* eyes. You may understand more; but you must search with the heart as well as with the mind. I think of those beautiful lines by Mrs. Hemans:

> There is a Book, who runs may read,
>   Which Heavenly truth imparts
> And all the lore its scholars need—
>   Pure eyes and Christian hearts!

With such eyes you may look and *see*. With such hearts you may seek and *find*, and you may also *understand*. And if you are not a Christian, you may yet be good, and have a kind and faithful heart. You may also seek, and find, and understand!

CHAPTER IV

GEORGE HOLDING

HE said that he was born in Ireland, and called himself an Irishman. But he was not Celtic. His appearance did not affirm it. His name did not suggest it. His speech did not proclaim it. It was plain English, without a trace of provincialism. But he had had little, if any, education. He said " poisont " for poison, " onst " for once, " thinkin " for thinking, and so forth. That was all, and it may have been because he spent years of his early life amongst common sailors. He was a runaway lad from his home, where he had been harshly treated, when he took to the sea. I remember his telling how he and other Irish boys had played with empty barrels, balancing themselves on the tops whilst trundling them along with their feet. I think he said it was at Belfast.

He was doubtless an Ulster man, of Anglo-Saxon descent. In height five foot eight, a blonde, with keen grey eyes, wavy brown, yellow-tinged hair, pronounced brows, straight nose, firm mouth and chin, a strong beard to match the hair, well-shaped ears, a fine head upon a good neck, set squarely between his sturdy shoulders, a well-developed chest, a pair of brawny arms, a well-knit figure on good sound legs, age thirty, a man of muscle and of iron, and a goodly man to look upon—such was George Holding when he came to us in the later sixties of last century.

He was self-taught, was a fair reader, though not much of a speller, could write a decent hand, could count well and quickly, and do any elementary calculation correctly. Thus he had lifted himself far above the class he had associated with in his younger days. While at sea he had travelled to distant parts, considered more distant in those times of seventy years ago. He would say as little as possible of himself. He had not a grain of the braggart. He was decently modest. If you wished to learn anything about him, you had to draw him out, get him to speak in a general way of matters and events with which he had been connected, and figure out the rest for yourself. He had been to China, through the China Seas, and to Japan. He described some of the ports, and his knowledge coincided to some extent with what our school-books taught, though that was not much. His description as regards China would probably hold to-day, for they do not like alterations there. Occasionally foreigners go in and make a few changes to suit themselves, when they get the chance.

He had been to Further India. At some spot on the coast, he was landed with a company of seamen. There was a disturbance, the seat of which centred some way inland. They joined up with another body of men, were given arms, and marched for the scene. On the way, they were ambushed in the long grass, and a mere handful of them escaped. It slipped out that he had received a wound in the leg ; but he would not speak of it further.

He had sailed the broad Atlantic, had passed among the West Indian Islands, crossed the Great Mexican Gulf, and had lain for many weeks in quarantine aboard his ship, off the city of New Orleans. The dreaded " Yellow Jack " had boarded the vessel, and it raged amongst the ill-fated men. The whole ship's company were swept off, and there survived but one of the crew and the captain. Holding represented the crew ; but he did not say it in the words.

Now I will set down some probabilities. They fill and fit the blank page, and harmonize with other cases. He may have been a deserter from the merchant service. Ships arrived at the Cape, after voyages of several months without touching at any ports on the way. Many of the crew perished of scurvy and other horrible diseases, arising from the absence of good water and wholesome victuals. The quarters of the men were mere " pigsties " crammed under the forecastle. With a brutal captain, and a fiendish mate, the lives of the men were scarcely their own. These harsh officers were but the creatures of the wicked owners, for whom they were out to gather wealth as best they could. The Board of Trade of those days was not the Board of Trade of to-day. There was much neglect and many abuses. But it must not be forgotten that vessels were not heard of for long periods, and were rarely bespoken in the slender traffic, when ships were fewer, and the passages took longer. The seafaring laws were difficult to enforce. Cables were not yet established, and wireless was unknown. The administration of justice was slower, and the execution of its decrees more tardy. Consequently there were many and flagrant infringements.

In such times, after a weary voyage, a ship cast anchor at Table Bay, facing the magnificent Table Mountain. The men gazed with yearning eyes upon the fairy scene. Tales were rife of the sunny life on the hospitable shore, of congenial labour inland, of work and good pay on the Karroo farms. It was enough. It was too much. If the night fell dark, and the longed-for opportunity presented itself, well, the next morning the crew numbered one or two the less. And who shall blame the deserter under such conditions? It was almost a duty to himself. I have known the same men as faithful and trustworthy employees. It should go a long way towards exonerating them.

Holding was in all probability one of these men. It may not have been his real name. It does not signify. Whoever and whatever he was, he came to us, and my father thought fit to engage him. The result was amazing. He proved a veritable "Jack of all trades," and though "master of none," could do everything well enough for the required purposes. He was marvellously handy and useful. He was with us off and on for ten years. We were thirty miles from the nearest village, the road a mere cart track. There were no railways. It was well for the farm to be self-contained to the greatest possible extent. What he could do and did I shall tell you. How he came to be able to do them I cannot say. But I saw him do them. He quarried and chiselled stone, and built stone walls. It was only rough work ; but it was hard and required experience. He built houses, floored and ceiled them, put on the wood and iron roofs or thatched them. He built weirs and large dams. He mended and rigged up various pumps. He laid down pipe lines, making ingenious contrivances of access for cleaning purposes, and for resisting the effects of undue water pressure. He erected windmills, took levels for a two-mile furrow, for which purpose he made a " theodolite " that proved effective, for the furrow was a success. He measured up a piece of work correctly and gave the square of the surface, or the cubic total, according to the nature of the job. He welded iron and was quite a tolerable blacksmith. He shod horses, spliced ropes, sank wells, mended and repaired all sorts of things, burnt lime and charcoal. He ploughed, sowed, and reaped wheat, oats, barley, and mealies, and carried out all the duties of a sheep farmer besides. He killed and cleaned pigs, cut them up, and cured the hams and the bacon. All these things and more he did, this truly remarkable man, and surely the list is long enough ! You may smile, and say that it is manifestly impossible ; but there are others living who know and can testify. I would venture to say that he did not *learn* to do any of them. There was not the time ! He had a wonderful gift of intuition, backed up by sound common sense, and strength of purpose. He willed to do them and found a way. I will give you a typical instance.

The problem arose of a wholesome drink-water supply for the house. When the river was in flood, the springs became befouled with the alluvial mud. In the rainy season this might last for weeks, and leave us dependent upon the yellow water for drinking, cooking and washing. My father wished to have a well sunk in the yard adjoining the premises. But blasting operations were necessary, and there was danger of fire. The burning fuse would be sent up by the explosion, and would in all probability alight on the thatched roof of the house. He spoke to Holding, who answered that it would be all right. My father had confidence in him, and, though Holding had no notion at the time of the precautions required to meet the danger, he had sufficient confidence in himself to be sure that he would find a way out. The work was commenced forthwith. After sinking a few feet, the hard limestone bed was encountered, and explosives were necessary. A charge of powder was put into the hole that had been drilled. We had no dynamite then. Holding had procured a large mimosa branch that he had caused to be cut for the purpose, and when the charge was fired, he threw it over the mouth of the well, the explosion followed and the flaming fuse was caught up in the thorns of the branch, although this was blown to some distance by the upward rush of air. At 20 feet the blue stratum underlying the limestone was reached. A few more blasts, and fairly strong running and clear water was met with. It was still necessary to continue sinking, and to make an excavation below the hard blue rock, which would serve as a strong roof. The cavity was required for the accumulation of a body of water for drawing or pumping. Here was a new difficulty. No one knew what was to be done. Holding I am sure had had no previous experience of such a case. Where indeed should he have met with it? But he said nothing.

He took a piece of good leather, cut it into shape, and sewed an elongated bag to fit the drill hole. He filled the bag with powder, inserted the fuse, which he had cut to the length that he deemed necessary, stitched up the leather well around the point of contact with the fuse, and coated the part with tallow to make sure of keeping out moisture. With the aid of the kaffir boy, he then drew up the accumulated water from the well, drilled the hole, fitted in the bag with its charge, and tamped it firmly home.

The well was now 22 feet deep, and our longest ladder was requisitioned. Holding fired the fuse with a stump of firewood having a live coal at the end. It was surer than a match. He then climbed out, pulled the ladder after him, laid it down, threw the thorn-branch over the mouth of the well, and walked to a distance of twenty paces. His calculation was wondrously near. The explosion followed almost immediately. A little more plying of pick and shovel, a few more blasts, and the work was done. We had our coveted supply of wholesome water. The method of insurance against fire had proved thoroughly effective. "All's well that ends well!"

Holding was a man who knew no fear. I shall never forget the time when the river was in the height of a flood previously unknown. He was anxious, for some reason, to get back to the outstation where he was then located, and which lay nine miles beyond the further bank. He had come over to the homestead a few days earlier, when the flood had not yet arrived. Without any hesitation, and in spite of earnest endeavours to dissuade him, he stripped, tied his clothes and boots in a close bundle behind his shoulders, and threw himself into the boiling waters. He was a strong swimmer, but he was swept away like a straw, and could scarcely be seen in the turmoil of the flood. It looked as though nothing could live in it. Away and down he was carried for nearly two hundred yards. He was halfway across. Then he was sucked under the seething confusion of billows as the waters thundered tumultuously over a broad rocky dyke. Merciful God! he was lost! For a few agonizing moments he was invisible to all eyes, when suddenly he reappeared fifty yards lower down, swimming strongly and desperately for the further bank. A few more vigorous strokes, and another thirty yards lower, and—hurrah! he was there! He seized hold of the projecting stakes of the sheep-washing kraal and drew himself out of the awful swirl. He shook the water off his bundle, dressed himself, and without turning to look, marched off as if nothing had happened.

A week later he was again at the homestead. As congratulations were offered him on his narrow escape, he stared in amazement. He declared that he had been perfectly safe throughout all that frightful swim, and that at no time had he been aware of any danger. One might have thought that this was mere bravado. But he had no such failing. It was doubtless as he said, and in those dreadful moments as they appeared to us, he was calm and confident. Yet it was more than remarkable. It was wonderful!

On another occasion, at that same outstation, he had charge of seven kaffirs working at the large dam. One morning, at sunrise, he shouted them up as usual; but it was chilly, and they lingered over their camp fire. He walked up and accosted them, but they remained stolid. He struck one of them with his open hand, and instantly they were on their feet, seized their sticks, and set upon him. He retreated, parrying the blows with his powerful arms. He fetched the nearest and most aggressive one a blow with his fist that laid him low, with his cheek cut open to the bone. Eighty yards he backed, till he got up against the wall of his house, and there stood at bay. In the course of a few minutes, as they pressed upon him, they had broken most of their sticks upon his arms, and he had wrenched the remainder from their grasp. He then turned the tables and was after them. They threw large stones. He dodged them this way and that. Some struck him on the body, but none hit his head. He laid it into them with their own sticks, and drove them to their work.

I had it all from an eye-witness, a lad of eleven, who gave me a circumstantial account that was supported by corroborating circumstances, for Holding would not speak of it. But a couple of days after the affair, the boy whom he had knocked down came to lay a complaint before my father and, incidentally to purchase a few necessaries at our store. He brought a note from Holding, who merely stated that he had struck the bearer for being insolent! The boy was told to go back to his work and behave himself. Now, if Holding, at that onset, had faltered in the least, he would in all probability have paid forfeit with his life. There was not another man at the station to render any help. In those far-off days on the lonely farms, men sometimes carried their lives in their hands, and an occasional tragedy was bound to take place.

After he left us, Holding went to live at the Dorp. There had been an appalling drought. Three-fourths of our small stock had perished, and there were other grave losses. We could not afford to employ him longer. He drew good pay for those times—ten shillings a day, and quarters provided, he finding his own food. Besides, we boys had grown up, and could manage one way or another without extraneous assistance.

He bought a piece of ground and started as a speculative builder. Before his first two houses were completed, he had run out of funds. He came to the office where I was then employed, and tried to persuade the firm to insure his life for £500, and to buy the policy for £200. The doctor would pass him, he said, for he was in good health. Nevertheless, he was sure he had only a short time to live, and that it would prove a good spec! The inducements, however, were not convincing, and the proposition was turned down. But poor Holding was not far out. At the utmost he did not live for another six years. Anyway, I am glad to record that he got over his difficulty. He sold one house, got enough money on account to finish the two, and this solved the entire financial problem.

Some three and a half years later, he went to a farm thirty-three miles distant by rail on the Kimberley line, for he was still staying at the Dorp. The rails had been laid originally to Wellington, extended about ten years later to Beaufort West, and continued to the great diamond centre. He had been engaged to fix up the roof of a building. While at this job, he slipped, lost his footing, and was precipitated on to the stone flags below. Such a fall would have killed nearly any man, and he was now over fifty years of age. But he recovered and was still able to work. He lived a little above two years longer, and then passed quietly over into the Great Beyond. His work was done!

He had no ambition. His motto was a good day's work for a good day's wage, and he lived up to it. He was moderate in all things. He liked his glass, though I have never known him the worse for liquor, and he could have had all he wanted. But now I come to the seamy and unfortunate side of his life, that which rightly and permanently bars a white man in South Africa from equality of association with his fellow-men. He had a coloured woman as a partner, who kept house and lived with him. She had lost her first man, by whom she had two sons. Holding had saved the life of one of these boys. That he did not marry her was well. The mating of white and black is bad ; but the marriage is odious. It would have ruined him beyond possibility of reclaim. But he treated her well, and was entirely loyal to her. They had one little girl, who I believe never grew up. Nevertheless, Holding was a clean-living man. You, who have or have not married wives, and cannot say as much of your own lives, do not cast stones!

The rich and the great may sin flagrantly, and the lively half section of modern society will smack its lips in relish. If only they do not openly outrage the conventions, our present day world will tolerate. It is so decent in its indecency, so moral in its immorality. Ours is a devious world, a wicked world, and it is so wicked in its unctuous righteousness. Those in high places may transgress, and oh! if they be only discreet in their misdeeds, we are pleased to sit at their table, very proud to shake hands! Nay, we grovel for the notice of a nod or a smile!

George Holding was not religious in the Churchman's sense ; but he was a very sincere man. I have known him stand by a graveside, hat in hand, in attitude of deep reverence, and heard him join in the Lord's Prayer with the utmost fervour. At a sick bed he was gentle as a woman. In all the years I have never heard him curse or swear, nor ever utter a foul word. One evening we were talking upon a subject that used to be discussed in those days, the question of the lodgment of the soul between the hour of death and the day of Judgment. "There is no such time," he declared. "As a man's breath leaves his body, he hears the trumpet sound the resurrection call, and immediately he has to cast himself on the mercy of God and face the Judgment!"

He was a man whom you could trust and leave alone for months, assured that things would go on all right. He was always up with the sun, and if it were a close call, you may be certain that he was first. The moment he was out, he gave a shout in his stentorian voice that almost shook the others out of their beds, a hail to pipe all hands to work. And how he toiled, ceaselessly, but for the recognized hours of refreshment: "A good day's work for a good day's wage," were his own words. There were no eight-hour days then, there were few off-days, and the holidays were unpaid. We worked from sunrise to sundown, and often much longer.

He never took a liberty, and no one but a very fool would ever have attempted to take a liberty with him. His very presence forbade it. You might as well have tried to hang your hat on the roof of the house! He adhered rigidly to the plane to which he had adjusted his life. He would not sit at table with any of us unless expressly invited. He shook hands with none that came, unless the hands was first extended to him, and he responded so as not to offend. He was unostentatious and modest, and his attitude was studiously correct. If you wished to converse with him, he would be glad to talk, with the reservations mentioned. Once a party was holding forth rather egotistically to Holding, when the latter bluntly asked him what was the use of blowing his own trumpet? "Well, George," was the unabashed reply, "if you don't blow your own trumpet who will blow it for you?" At which Holding laughed heartily and remarked: "Well, there is a lot in that!"

On the other hand he never descended below the level of the line that he had ruled so clearly. He did not converse with the coloured people, and if any inferior white men came to work on the farm, he would talk to them; but he was never as one of them.

With the advantages of a good rearing and education, Holding might have attained to something considerable. But greatness was not for him. Nevertheless, with all his disadvantages, or with any specific disability, and notwithstanding the great misfortune of his life, as one might regard it, he was better than the unworthy bearer of an empty title, for he was one of Nature's noblemen. And he was more than mere nobleman, for he WAS A MAN!

It is written, that according to a man's faith, so shall it be unto him. Soft as wool will be your hard, strong muscles, George, and the iron of your soul will melt like wax when you stand in the dread presence of the Almighty Judge. You will tremble exceedingly, fearless George, as you cast yourself upon the great mercy. I take off my hat, George, and I breathe a prayer:

"May you receive abundant pardon of that boundless grace, may abiding peace descend upon you after the long conflict, and may you find blessed rest after your many days of toiling. Amen!"

CHAPTER V

OUT OF THE SEA

FROM out of the sea he came to us. He was one of the crew on a schooner that had sailed from the Indies, and which was wrecked on the South African coast. They were caught in a storm, the ship was driven on the rocks, and went to pieces. Nearly all on board were drowned. Some were washed ashore, and a mere handful survived. He was among the latter. As he came to consciousness a voice sounded in his ears: "Oh, he is done for, poor fellow!" A box, with his belongings, was beached quite close to him. This was something; at any rate, a slight compensation in his misfortune. He took it as an omen. He would not go back to sea again, and nothing would induce him. He had been violently cast into the waters, drowned, again forcibly ejected, and his goods sent after him! But he had come to life once more. It was enough. He would not tempt Providence again.

How he found his way into the Karroo, and on to our farm, and why he came to *us*, I do not know, for I never heard. There were no railways then; but there were other modes of travelling, and I think he had a little money. He was eager to learn the farming of which he had already heard so much, and my father engaged him.

He was of medium height, rather slender build, had stooping shoulders, strong features, a prominent aquiline nose, dark eyes, thick black hair, and a heavy moustache. He had a quick, jerky, excited way of speaking.

We had not a bed hard enough for him, so he put his mattress on the boarded floor and slept there. Having roughed it before the mast for some years—he was now about twenty-six—he declared that he could not sleep on a soft bed. But we soon found him a hard straw pallet, and with that he was content.

He was very earnest and conscientious, and entered keenly upon his duties. He was ignorant of the work, but he was inherently reliable. Therefore, notwithstanding his inexperience, he soon proved useful. And he was a worker. Before long he picked up enough of the "Taal" to be understood by the boys; but his earlier attempts were amusing, though they sometimes resulted in misunderstandings and mistakes. Though he was so downright serious, he took it all in good part when we laughed.

He persevered, for he was "a goer." He was not clever, and he was not particularly strong; but his courage and sincerity pulled him through. I do not think that he was much fitted for a farmer; but never would he go to sea again, not he! He had a good education for those days, and there must have been other things for him to do had he wished to look for them. Anyway, he would not be idle; he got a grip of the work and he got on.

One of his difficulties was to distinguish an animal from another of the same kind. This is hard for anyone not born to it, and it takes years to acquire any capability. No two sheep, no two oxen, horses, or even ostriches are alike; but to the untrained eye it is all a riddle.

I last saw our friend on the occasion of a race-meeting at the Dorp, on the Queen's birthday, May 24, 1880. This was some years after he left us. He was in hot dispute with another man, for that he, the other, had ridden his, our friend's, horse (so our friend thought). The poor horse was blowing hard and dripping with sweat. The other party protested that the animal was his own. Just then an acquaintance who knew them both came on the scene, and pointed out to the angry claimant his *bona fide* property tethered to a cart a few feet away, cool as a cucumber, and lazily whisking away the flies with its tail. The two animals were nearly of the same colour, otherwise there was not the remotest resemblance between them. Moreover, the other man's horse *was a mare*!

Our farming friend from the sea stayed with us for nearly two years, and I do not think that anyone found fault with him. He was too genuine. He had accumulated or inherited some money, and after he left us he went to farm on his own in an adjoining district. But except for that one day at the races, when he laid claim to the wrong horse (?), I did not see him again, nor did I hear of him since. He was one of the many who came to us from various places, and under varying circumstances, and he was one of the best. It is of such that I like to think and speak, and of such that I care to hear—these simple, honest, hard-toiling men, unspoilt by the world, unstained by its impurities, unsullied by its sordid greed, and not unmanned by its adversities and hardships.

I will give you a sketch of our friend's first attempt at milking the goats. He was located with my brother at the Eastern Station to assist at the tending of the season's lambing. They had a few "milk-goats," and as the herd was not handy to milk them that evening our friend took a pail and went to try his hand. But when he sought to catch them, the goat-ewes scaled the seven-feet high wall of the kraal, and ran away into the veld. He rushed in pursuit and drove them back. This occurred repeatedly, and after several repetitions, his powers, his perseverance, his patience and his piety petered out. He was most particular about his language, but now a change took place. He stood in the centre of that kraal, with the milk pail in one hand, and denounced the goat-ewes with the other. He drew heavily and at sight upon the "seaman's vocabulary," and cashed up all arrears. He told those goat-ewes what he thought of them, he cursed them by the beards of their ancestors, and he cursed them by the horns of their grandmothers. But they turned never a hair. They would have played the game if he had not "played the goat"; but whereas they had been used to the quiet ways and gentle methods of the herd, *he* had descended upon them like an avalanche, and they were scared.

Finally he left the kraal, *well read,* but little wiser, a sad and angry man, with the milk of human kindness all in a jar, yet having none of the milk of the goats within his pail.

CHAPTER VI

HENDRIK JONES

HE came to the homestead farm in the early 'sixties of last century, and he stayed with us for a little more than four years. He was a bastard Cape boy. That is to say that the white blood in him predominated over the Hottentot, although he was very dark.

In height 5 feet 7½ inches, compactly built, though not stout, a round head upon a bull neck between a pair of strong shoulders, a good chest, medium and well-shaped limbs, a symmetrical figure, regular, but not striking features, brown eyes, and black, curly hair, age twenty-eight years—such was the Hendrik Jones of those days.

His physical and bodily strength was remarkable, and was regarded with fear and superstition by the coloured people. Strange stories, mostly founded on a substratum of fact, were circulated concerning his extraordinary deeds and prowess. They were naturally exaggerated. The Hottentots declared that he was invincible, that he was as strong as the mountain, that he had been placed under the spell of witchcraft by the dark art of certain Malays, and that no mere human power could prevail over him!

It was recalled and told that at the Dorp he had got mixed up in a fracas, and the police had attempted to arrest him. That they had assembled all available reinforcements to the number of thirteen men, and had advanced upon him. That he had planted his back against a tree and waited for them. That he had played with them, and bowled them over like ninepins when they had tried to throw themselves upon him. That at the last the diplomatic chief constable had walked up and had appealed to him to march off to prison like a man. That, in response, Hendrik had stepped out to the gaol, the force falling in at the rear and following at a respectful distance!

He had a wife and four children. One of the boys had six fingers upon each hand. This was regarded as another weird omen, and served to heighten the mystery.

An old Hottentot told me something of the process by which Hendrik was bewitched. He said that the latter was taken to a room, and induced to recline upon a couch in the far corner. The place was lit by candles, and the wizards drummed, chanted and uttered their incantations. They unclasped a string of beads from Hendrik's neck and laid them down in a coil in the corner diagonally opposite. As the drumming grew louder, as the chanting swelled in volume and the incantations became fiercer and yet more dreadful, the lights burned dim and low. Then slowly the coil of beads unwound itself, deliberately and without sound it glided across the floor like a serpent upon its belly. It came to

Hendrik Jones as he lay, entwined softly round his neck, and reclasped itself in its place. It was again but a string of beads! The lights flared up once more, the spell had been cast, and the dark work was finished! The Hottentots believed these things! But they also had much of the true wisdom that we neglect. And what of *our* daily and lifelong fictions and absurdities? What indeed!

Hendrik was certainly a strong man. He was also very intelligent and handy. He could do a big and heavy day's work, and he served as an excellent pace-maker for the other hands. We have to thank him that our younger brother is alive to-day. The latter, who was then but a three-year-old baby, and I, who was little more, at something short of five years, were together upon the tank wall. There was a drowning toad in the tank, which contained three-and-a-half feet of water. My brother lay down on the wall and tried to fish it out with a piece of wood. He reached over too far and fell in. In an agony of consternation I shouted and yelled to the utmost capacity of my little lungs. Hendrik and another man, Philip, who were working in the garden hard by, heard me, and rushed to the rescue. They were only just in time!

Some two years after this, Hendrik was, for the first and last time, guilty of insolence to my father. I do not know how it arose, or what he had said, but I saw my father walk up and strike him. Hendrik shook his finger and said warningly: "Take care! you know that I am strong!" My father, now thoroughly roused, struck him again and struck hard, and told him that he should conform to his obligations and yield obedience, otherwise he would beat him, or even shoot him, like a dog. After a little Hendrik went quietly back to his work. It was well. My father was a large and also a powerful man, and had an imperious will. I cannot imagine him allowing himself to be beaten by Hendrik. On the other hand, Hendrik—— Yes, it was well that it went no further! I was in mortal terror that my father would really get his gun and shoot Hendrik, and I shall never forget the fright I got. I was then but six years of age! That evening Hendrik came with surcharged heart to beg forgiveness, and my father gave him a "soupje"—*a small glass of Cape brandy*. All his life after that he was more than ever attached to my father, and was a zealous servant while in his employ.

He was splendid in the veld, and had a wonderful knack of manœuvring the springboks to within rifle range—500 yards—of the road. My father invariably took him along in the cart when he drove over the "flats," and they never returned without a bag, sometimes as many as four bucks, besides a few head of smaller game. Hendrik had also a marvellous way of luring the wild ostriches close up to the cart. He seemed to play upon their natural curiosity. He would wave his hat and shout, whistle, and produce peculiar sounds out of his throat, gesticulate and contort his body, and a bird would approach to within a few yards! This was another plank in the platform of superstition upon which he stood, to the awe of the poor blacks!

After he left us, he went to the Dorp and enrolled as a constable. In charge of a hard-labour party he was a valuable man, for he directed the work with intelligence, and got twice the service out of the men that any other warder would have done. When he occasionally happened to meet my father, he would advance, hat in hand, and reverently greet him as "My dear old master!" And he always got a shilling. His devotion, and the memory of the dear old days was worth it. I only hope that the consideration of the oft-repeated tip did not loom more largely in poor Hendrik's mind than the regard of his loyalty and attachment.

It was in April, 1876, that I last saw Hendrik in the pride of his virile strength, and in the full power of his splendid manhood. With rifle slung negligently over his shoulder, he guarded nine convicts, and superintended the shifting of a huge piece of rock that must have weighed upwards of a ton. One plied the lever, another placed the props, while three assisted on one side and four on the other. He called them each by name, he guided the man with the lever, he directed the man with the props, and he advised, urged, and timed the rest. The great stone rocked and swayed, it was raised and overturned, it was slued this way and that, it was pushed, dragged and shoved, and it literally walked into place. They toiled, they tugged, they strained, they sweated at every pore, and they yielded implicit and unquestioning obedience, for the voice that spoke was the magic voice of Hendrik, and it was his compelling command that willed and ordered.

In his later years poor Hendrik met his match, and fell on evil days. He sacrificed his worthy and glorious manhood to an unworthy and inglorious foe that was stronger than he. He became a victim of the wicked and implacable Cape brandy that has slain so many of his class, and to-day stalks unashamed through our dear land, dealing out degradation and death. It sapped his great strength. It bit him like fiery serpents the long day, and stung him like the black scorpions through the hours of night. It entered his vitals, and devoured the soft coatings of his stomach. It burnt his poor bowels, corroded his liver, and corrupted his fine body. It scourged him with whips of red-hot wire, and grievously marked his goodly person. His strong figure became unwieldy and bloated, and his well-shaped features grew coarse and distorted. The cold dews gathered upon his brow, and the unwholesome moisture strove vainly to cool and to quench the fiery furnace that raged within. By day he tottered like an old man, and at night he tossed upon a bed of flame. He fell finally and abjectly, and oh! how unspeakably pathetic was his fall, and how infinitely pitiful his fate! Merciful death snatched him from the living torture, and gracious, kindly mother earth received his already mouldering bones, and decently covered the poor remains of his once grand frame, and hid them from the vulgar gaze.

Nine years ago at Broadstairs I was lingering in one of those peaceful old English churchyards that breathe of the blessed rest to come. I paused before a well preserved tombstone, dated 1745. The inscription was a remarkable one. The carving was perfectly legible, but I was barely able to read it, for the twilight had already melted into darkness. I write from memory, and with amplifications and suitable alterations I apply the lines in commemoration of the man who had been so fine and strong.

Once glorious Hendrik, famed for strength,
At last lies here, his breadth and length:
Lo! how the mighty man hath fallen,
To Death the great and small are all one;
It takes the weak nor spares the strong,
It slays the good, and smites the wrong,
'Twill come to you, 'twill come to me—
What right you do, how wrong I be—
'Twill count us each, both me and thee;
It comes to one, it comes to all,
And the same judgment doth befall,
Goliath huge as David small!

CHAPTER VII

OLD DAY

HE was with us for the better part of five years, and we knew him as "Old Day"; but he was barely forty when he arrived at the old homestead in 1872.

He had been at a farm in an adjoining district before he came to our place; but whence he hailed originally none of us knew. We boys were but young, and to us he was already old. He seemed a decent, well-spoken fellow, looked a likely hand, and wanted work. That was enough. He may have had some trouble to hide, or to forget, and have come to this fag end of the world to bury himself and his sorrow together. It was none of our business. Only within the last few years I learnt by mere accident that he had escaped from the tyranny of a hard lot at sea, and I also heard his real name. But I have already forgotten it, because I did not wish to remember it, for what can it be to me? It is now more than ten years since he was laid to rest, and he was quite an old man. There were many such as he, who journeyed into the wilderness to get away from trouble, and many of them also proved very good, honest and industrious people.

He was a diminutive Welshman, and he did not scale much above six and a half stone! Light as a feather, nimble on his feet, wiry and active, and hard as nails he was. He had a sharp, aquiline profile, rugged features, strong brows, keen, greyish-brown eyes, dark hair, and a small scanty beard to match. He could trot and tramp from daybreak till dark, and was therefore a valuable hand at the outstations during the sheep-lambing. He was a notable example of tireless activity. He had the rudiments of an education, could count quickly, calculate correctly, was a fair reader, wrote a good letter and a fair hand. All-round he was a smart and intelligent man, and, as time went on, he also proved fairly reliable and trustworthy.

When I think of these men coming from the seas—men who had roughed it in many climes, who had been through stirring incidents and changes, who had visited many ports and cities and had passed through strange adventures, who had battled through hardships of life and faced many storms upon the great ocean—coming at last to bury themselves quietly and decently in the Great Karroo desert, there to render good, faithful and patient service, in a hard, exacting and discouraging cause, and to lead useful and industrious lives in unfamiliar and dreary surroundings—I say, when I think of these men and ponder upon these things, then I cannot help but marvel, and I am filled with respect and admiration for their memory, and with the kindest thoughts of their humble and rugged lives.

Shortly after his arrival, Old Day was sent to one of the outstations to tend the lambing of the sheep. He was shifted alternately from the Eastern to the Western station, or vice versa, to remain a year at one place, and then a year at the other, unless the more favourable condition of the veld rendered it advisable that he should stay for an additional season at the place where he was already located. Between the time of one and the next lambing, there was always plenty of other work at these stations to keep them busy.

The Western station was a bleak, dreary-looking spot, although there was a fair orchard and a decent house; but the Eastern station had far greater natural attractions, and it was well wooded. Day always declared that he would rather be hanged at the Eastern than die a natural death at the Western station! It made him feel quite ill when a removal was ordered to the latter place.

Nevertheless he did very well at these stations, and he was one of the best hands we ever had for the duties that fell to him. He used to come over to the homestead at shearing time and do the wool sorting, at which he was quite expert. He also came to lend a hand with the dipping if it did not clash with his duties at the stations. Always keenly alert, he was a dependable man in charge of the hook.

He had a queer dry humour of his own, though I never heard him laugh. One day as he was seated at dinner at the Western station, he looked through the window down the homestead road and saw coming along on horseback the young Dutchman of vulture-dying fame (*vide* chapter on vultures). Said Day, "You know that chap who told us that the vultures went to Heaven before they died, and stayed up there? Well, he thinks he can ride; but I was looking down that road, and there he was jogging along. All of a sudden there was a great, big whirlwind of dust, and the next minute he came crawling out of it on his hands and knees, while the horse stood looking and waiting for him!"

On a certain occasion he came to the homestead on some business, having the middle finger of his right hand in splints. My father questioned him about it. "Oh! that," he said, "was Danster's head!" Danster was a diminutive Hottentot, almost as small as Day himself. He had the hard, round, bullet head of his kind, and was assisting Day at the station. "Oh yes!" added Day, "you don't know what Welsh blood is when it is roused!" "Well, I have certainly had no experience," replied my father.

Another time, this same Danster reported to him that he had seen a snake enter a mouse-hole. Day had a horror of snakes, and always gave them a wide berth if possible; but it was necessary to keep up some sort of appearance before this Hottentot. So he told the latter to direct him to the spot, and valiantly shouldered a spade for the necessary operations. There he came to a large mound of these "mouse-holes" as you may find them in the veld, and he promptly commenced to excavate at the point that the boy indicated. Now he might have dug for an hour without any result; but within five mintues, Day struck it lucky (?) and suddenly and unexpectedly out popped this ridiculous and unwelcome snake that he was digging for; but never intended, and still less imagined, to unearth! Right between his feet it emerged, and was almost upon him. Day dropped his spade and legged it as fast as the Lord, a good wind, and his nimble feet would let him. Danster followed a good second, for although his tribe sometimes happen to find snakes, they nevertheless do not look for them!

When Day had been with us for nearly three years, he asked for leave to visit the Dorp. My father let him have a cart and a pair of horses. He could not, or did not ride. It was the practice to combine business with pleasure, so he had a few commissions to execute, and was requested to bring a few things back with him. He returned to the homestead at nearly dark on the evening of the third day of his absence. It was bitterly cold, for it was the late winter time, and a bleak Westerly wind, such as searches the very marrow, was blowing. Moreover, poor old Day had been celebrating his holiday. He was by no means drunk, but the natural reaction, combined with a thirty-mile drive over a bad road with a pair of slow horses in the freezing cold and biting wind, might have bowled out a sturdy man. But, as I have said, Day was as hard as nails. Nevertheless, when he arrived he could hardly stand, and was too numbed to unharness the horses. There were willing hands enough, however, to do this for him. The question of his going on to the Western station, which was then his head-quarters, was, of course, a matter for the following day. His immediate and urgent need was warmth and rest. We gave him some hot tea and a bit of supper; but he was not hungry. We also handed him some empty wool-sacks, and what else we could spare, to make himself a shakedown in the smithy, or general workshop, and he quickly turned in.

From the wool-room, where we boys slept, there was an open doorway to the smithy, and in the latter there was a door with an upper and lower section, each upon its own hinges, that served as an exit and entrance to and from without. For the sake of fresh air and convenience, we had removed the "upper door" from its hinges, and stood it up against the wall beside the entrance. About ten o'clock that night Old Day, with many animadversions upon his state of cold and discomfort, got up and fumbled for this upper door, lifted it and tried to hook it on the hinges. It was by no means an easy thing to do, even in broad daylight, for a man that was feeling warm and good. Day struggled with the door for a while; but when he tried to hang it on the upper hinge, the lower became undone. Then when the upper hinge was hooked, it became in turn detached when the lower one was attempted. And so he battered and clattered, and puffed and blowed, and fussed and fumed till he worked himself into a frenzy. At last he dropped the door, and swore that if anyone came to the out-station and stayed the night, he would take the roof off the house! But the exercise and wrathful excitement had done him good. It was the very thing, for it roused that Welsh blood of his, sent it coursing through his veins, and warmed him. He let the door lie, got in between his wool-sacks, and slept like a top!

Not long before he left us he took another trip to the Dorp. His mission was festive; but the business was serious. He went to get married. Unfortunately, his bride was of the very dusky ones, for he was worthy of a decent white woman. The ceremony was performed by the local missionary. He did not bring his wife with him when he returned, after an absence of five days. He was of rueful countenance, and lamented all the trouble and expense that he had been put to. He commented severely upon the fee of three pounds sterling that the parson had exacted of him, and declared that if he had known that there would have been so much "neukerij"—*senseless bother*—about it, he would not have got married at all!

I have told you of his dread aversion to snakes. Human-like, it pleased him to know that there were others who were equally afraid of them and similarly he loved to tell a joke against the other fellow in the same connection. We had a herd named Hendrik Heyns, an off-coloured man with a strong bushy beard. He was a most extraordinarily inquisitive fellow, a bit of a braggart, and a "teller of fairy tales"; but he was quite a good herd. He was located near the outstation. To him the unimaginative, matter-of-fact Day took somewhat of a dislike, for he used to come to the station, pry into corners, and handle and turn over the various articles. One morning, however, Day was very pleased. He had something to tell that was doing him good. My brother had ridden across to the station, and this is what Day said to him :

" You know Hendrik Heyns ? You know what an inquisitive beggar he is ? Well, last week he was here, and he must needs meddle with everything as usual. He walks across to that cupboard over there, pulls open the door and looks in, and there lay 'Ou Tata' (the *Old Boy*—in this instance a large brown cobra) piled up in the corner, about *so* high ! " Here Day indicated with his hand a height of three feet from the floor—room enough for two huge boa constrictors ! " Aha ! Hendrik Heyns got the fright of his life. He fell flat on his back. He won't go to that cupboard again ! " concluded the gleeful Day.

And now I will also close, for I have told you a good deal about him. He served us well, and when he left he did not go far. He had also been caught by the strange, irresistible spell of the Karroo. He came, and he lived and he died in the great desert, that claimed his bones when he was old and worn and tired.

In Memoriam

The bright day passeth, for old and worn,
And tired is the day ;
The dark night cometh—all cold, forlorn,
Untried is the way :
Oh, watchman ! what of the drear dark night,
The blackness grim that shuts out the light ?
The fair morn dawneth all gold, and gone
Is the night that shall not stay :
Say, watchman, what of the radiant morn,
When glorious comes the day newborn ?

CHAPTER VIII

HUMBLE GRAVES

I THINK of a few humble lives that were lived in the Karroo. They have passed into the Great Beyond, and their bodies have been consigned to gracious mother earth, without any headstones to mark their resting-place. I am sure that not one of them would have wished an epitaph. They were good enough without it, and no good man needs one. If you publish his virtues, you may add to them, yet you cannot make them more! Nor can they with truth be made greater.

And if a man was not good, no after publication will make him better. And if he was a bad man, and the monument proclaims him good, it does but record that which is not true. Nor can it serve to smooth over or atone for misdeeds or shortcomings; but rather the reverse. It would carry on after death the evil that should be interred with the bones. For does it not say that he was good, and does it not invite others to follow in his footsteps? A man's true monument is the memory that he leaves behind him, and the work that lives after him.

Eleven hundred years ago, the great Persian Poet, Omar Khayam, wrote his remarkable verses. I quote from memory a few lines that I saw in a booklet long ago:

> There is a door to which I find no key,
> There is a veil past which I cannot see,
> A little talk of thee and me,
> And then no more of me and thee!

They serve to remind us how brief is the period that we may call our own, and, by inference, point to the necessity of making the most, and the best of it, while we can call it so. Some "religious" people would assert that they are the words of an unbeliever. Why so? They indicate the neutral position of one who has greatly pondered the matter, and neither accepts, nor rejects, that which is said to lie beyond the grave. The greatness of the problem surpasses him, his mind cannot grasp the mystery, nor can the power of his understanding plumb its depths. And thus it is with many noble souls, to whom the yonder lights have not been revealed, and by whom the greater voices have not been heard. But if they be faithful to the light that is in them, and obedient to the voice of conscience, what Churchman has the right to rank them as unbelievers, or to look at them askance?

After all, the writing is more sincere than the inscriptions on many thousands of grand monuments!

CHAPTER IX

TOMMY

IN bygone days we were the glad possessors of a dark, brindle-grey, tailless cat. He had a white breast, and a white band over the throat running half-way round the neck. He was a remarkably fine animal, sturdily and compactly built. No! he was not a manx. When he was little more than a kitten, in the hobbledehoy stage of cathood, so to speak, he was accidently locked up in the pantry one evening. This pantry had a stone floor, and there was a large earthenware jar, full of milk, on a shelf. During the night, Tommy got fooling about the jar, and, in endeavouring to sample the contents, finally pulled it over. As it came crashing down, he jumped to get clear; but his tail was caught by the vessel in the moment of its impact with the floor. When the door was opened next morning, a wilderness of smashed crockery and spilled milk lay revealed. Poor Tommy emerged from the wreck and the mess, looking somewhat the worse after a "night in," and trailing behind him, the greater length of his tail, still attached to the stump by a mere shred of skin. It happened to be Christmas morning. The better the day, the better the deed. We unearthed an old discarded meat-block, fetched out an ancient carving-knife that had gone into retirement, and requisitioned a carpenter's mallet. One of us securely held Tommy's head and body, while another, on the opposite side of the block, carefully supported the tail. Head one side, tail t'other! A third took up the knife and the mallet, and at one blow beheaded that cat's tail as well and as neatly as any public executioner could have done!

Well, we had that same cat for eleven years. I have seen him grab a swallow that came swooping too near to laugh and poke fun at him. I saw him nab a sparrow that was perching on the edge of a five-foot high stone wall, to the base of which Tommy had crept, and had there crouched for his spring. I also beheld him, while ensconced on the top of a tall thicket, with teeth and claws seize a bull-terrier by the nose. The dog had scrambled up there with intent to grab his prey. He was a couple of feet below the cat, and his footing was none too secure, so that he was at a considerable disadvantage. Tommy held him for some minutes for all his howlings, till I was able to procure the ladder and go to his rescue. Bully was mighty glad to be released, and to go and put his head under the pump. His nose behaved like Pompey's statue—at the fall of Cæsar—"which all the while ran blood," and it looked a veritable bridge of *size*! His ambition as regards the conquest of the cat was curbed, and he was in future obliged to embark upon enterprises of a less painful nature. He never meddled with Tommy after that!

Our remarkable cat had repeatedly come home dripping wet, when the river happened to be in flood. The inference was too extraordinary for appearances to be accepted at their face value. I therefore bided my time, and kept a look-out. Sure enough, yet to my great amazement, I was rewarded by seeing our grand old Tommy swim this very river when it was a raging torrent! Incredible as it seems, I was faced with the fact. Towards the close of the day, having returned from a long hunt, when he sometimes was absent for a fortnight, he found himself on the wrong side of the flood. The house was on the opposite bank of the stream, and he did not like to be shut out for the night. Without any hesitation, he took to the water. It was fully 150 feet across. As he breasted the tide, all that was visible of him was his head and the stump of a tail—just enough to proclaim to the world that he was not a Manx. Straight he sped as an arrow, and swiftly. I never saw so brave a swimmer. When he made his landing, the force of the current had carried him down but a few short yards. I do not think that any other living creature, except a fish or *some* water animal, could have performed the feat so well. Yet we all know what a horror cats have of any contact with water, and how they shrink, shudder, and shake at the mere touch of it with the foot!

After some of his adventurous trips, Tommy has at times come back to us covered with wounds. He had them mainly in front too, for he was never a runner! No doubt he had many a battle royal with the formidable " Graauwkats "—*Grey-cats*—that infested the jungle and the mimosa belts.

Poor old Tommy! Some years after seeing him perform that wonderful swimming feat, I was walking in the veld a couple of miles from the homestead, when I found him lying dead in the mouth of an abandoned " Aard-vark " hole. He had been away on a mousing expedition, had fallen sick, and seeking a temporary, had likewise found a permanent shelter, and a final resting place. It seemed a sad and sordid, and a very prosaic end for an animal with such a notable record. You may say of our dear cat, that he had a *dog's* end! But what would you? After all he was only a cat. BUT WHAT A CAT!

N.B.—Perhaps the following is worth recording. It concerns another of our cats. His name was Tom, and he was the predecessor and father of Tommy. I have seen Tom, with lightning stroke, whip a fish out of a running stream with his paw. The fish was a " Klipspringer "—*Rock leaper*—an exceedingly strong swimmer. I have heard that cats will take fish from a bowl, and I have read that the Jaguar takes them from the river; but I think, for an ordinary cat, Tom's exploit was remarkable. This might have been lumped with Tommy's deeds and the tale woven as a single fabric—or fabrication! Such short-cut conveniences are tempting; but I am dealing with facts and not with fiction.

CHAPTER X

ADONIS

HE was not "a thing of beauty," though his name would suggest it, and he was assuredly not "a joy for ever"! On the contrary, he was not merely plain, for he was downright and hideously ugly. Neither was he in any respect a creature of utility. No, he was a very imp of mischief! Like all of his class, he was easily angered when teased, and for a moment his mood would become violently vindictive. At such a time he was a danger to any children that might happen to be within reach. He was kept on a chain, attached to an iron hoop that fitted loosely round a straight pole, 12 feet long, planted firmly in the ground, the contrivance so arranged, that he could run up and slide down the shaft with facility. A small square board was fixed to the top of the pole by way of a seat. To this he would hurriedly scramble, and would squat there for a while after a prank that called for chastisement, and wait for the tempest of wrath that he had evoked to subside again. If necessary, he would stay up there till the coast was clear, for he was artful and cunning *as a load of monkeys.*

My brother once handed him a glass flask filled with mimosa gum. The stopper had become fixed, and adhered immovably to the neck of the bottle. The gum was his greatest treat, and the frantic way he turned that flask about, trying desperately to pick at the contents with his fingers, was very amusing.

His extreme inquisitiveness was a universal trait in his race. A "burning glass" puzzled him and greatly excited his curiosity. He submitted to various experiments, and watched with enthralled interest the bright point of light and combustion on his hand. But he bounded two feet into the air when the heat penetrated below the surface of his thick skin. He soon abandoned his thirst after research, and threw curiosity to the winds. When he saw any one approach with the lens, he speedily made for his perch, and surveyed matters scientific from a place of security.

He revelled in a "rough and tumble"; but you had to be on your guard, as he was liable to inflict severe bites in the exuberance of his excitement.

Occasionally we undid his chain, and he accompanied us into the veld. As we gradually drew out of sight of the homestead, he became greatly concerned. He ran back repeatedly for a few yards, stood up on his hind legs to obtain a fuller view, and hailed the old spot with cries of the utmost solicitude. When at last we were quite beyond vision of the place, he kept us close company. The unaccustomed loneliness was too much for him. Did he have the gift of speech, he might have soliloquized as follows:

> "Oh, Solitude! where is the charm
> These people do see in thy face?
> I would rather be chained secure from all harm,
> Than roam in this desolate place!"

(With apologies to the author of "Alexander Selkirk.")

At other times we took him along with us when we went to bathe in the river-pools. We all jumped into the water together, and he swam amongst us with the keenest enjoyment. He was one of the boys!

But as the years rolled by, he became too clever. He examined and fingered the fastenings of his chain, till he learned to unfasten it himself. No matter how we fixed it, he found a way to loosen it. His first escapade on gaining his freedom, was to enter the fowl-run, which had an open roof. He pulled the sitting hens off their nests, and broke their eggs. Then he scampered off into the garden, and uprooted the plants. He entered the vineyard, and if the grapes were not yet ripe, he stuffed the pouches inside his cheeks to their full capacity with the hard, sour fruit.

The end came at last. We had had him since he was a baby, and was fed only on milk and porridge. Now he was an adult, and getting on in years. Full of cunning, craft, subtlety, and all evil, he had become more than a nuisance. He was a menace. When next he broke bonds and bounds, which now happened as often as twice a week, he was chevied hot-foot out of the vineyard. He was very fearful of a gun, and when he saw us following with the weapon, he realized that the pursuit would be to the death, and he was thoroughly alarmed. He made a dash for life, scrambled hastily to the house-top, and dodged behind the chimneys. From one point of vantage and another, he was dislodged with hurtling sticks and stones, while a marksman waited patiently below for an opening, with gun at the ready. It came after a deal of bother, and a quick pot-shot pierced Adonis, our dear old baboon, through the heart. Down the sloping roof he came tumbling, passed over the eaves, and fell with a thud amongst the flower-beds in front of the house. On his back he lay, his hairy arms extended abroad in the abandon of death, and his cheeks still distended with the hard, green grapes, the last of his spoils of which he had yet retained possession !

It was a stirring and by no means an inglorious end for one of his kind.

And such was the close of his career, which, though we cannot term it dull, was lacking of incident except in its eventful finish. I have sometimes thought that there was not sufficient ingenuity brought to bear on the fixing of that chain. There was not a suitable padlock available. Anyway, it was certainly no compliment to be outwitted by an ape ! However, most things happen for the best. What fate awaited him if left to grow old ? Probably the usually sordid one, a period of sickness and decay, and a leaden bullet at the last to avoid further suffering. It is well as it was !

Yes, Adonis, so interestingly and peerlessly ugly; for all your evil and mischief you were a lively, affectionate, and entertaining companion. Brimful of activity, and intense curiosity, your many mixed qualities made your life at least worth living, notwithstanding that they likewise conspired to fulfil the ultimate tragedy!

CHAPTER XI

VIXEN

SHE was brought to me in the infancy of puppyhood, the gift of a genial and kindly soul, a near neighbour, long since gone to his rest. I was myself but a little nipper at the time, verging on my sixth year. She had a white coat, with a brownish-yellow patch on one side, and a similar large spot over one eye, and partly covering the ear. A nondescript, a mixture of generations of mixed breeds of dogs, of almost impossible analysis; but the physical strain of the pointer and the bull-terrier still predominating. This last item was a sufficient warrant for my father to crop her ears and tail, so as to accentuate her appearance as a bull-bitch. Sedulously I cared for and nursed her, and for a few weeks she mostly lived in my arms.

In early youth she proved herself a keen and indefatigable hunter. Before long, pretty well everything we happened across in the veld, was unearthed or started on the run by her, though we had a pack of some six dogs in all. She seemed instinctively attracted to the lair of every animal. We might happen on scores of empty holes that she would scarcely notice, but so soon as we came across one that harboured a living thing, she was the first to discover it. And one way or another she would rout it out, unless it was an aard-vark—ant-eater. As all experienced South Africans know, the dog has not been invented that can cope with this animal underground! Porcupines, yes; jackals, wild-cats, hares, rabbits, leguans—up they would come or die down below. She would dig her way in, widening the hole as might be necessary, then harass and wear out the inmates till they broke cover in desperation, or, till cowed and tired out, they succumbed an easy prey. In the latter case she was always sport enough to drag them to the surface, and thus exhibit visible evidence of the "corpus delicti." When it came to a straight run, she had no show. At such times the fleeter greyhound element dealt with the situation; but she usually managed to be in at the death. Not infrequently, however, she scored in contriving to grab her game in the act of its breaking away. She would stand at rigid attention, ofttimes in pointing attitude, and, may be, within a foot or two of the quarry, and never pounce until it moved.

She was a plucky fighter, and licked many a good dog in a scrap. For one thing, her ceaseless industry served to keep her in the pink of condition. As the result of her many encounters with baboons, she had only a few scars; but never any serious wounds. She always went straight for the throat, which was the only safe way for any dog in dealing with a baboon.

In early life she began to take an active concern in snakes. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, this would signify a brief period of interest in things mundane as regards the life of any dog. But it was not so with good old Vixen. She fully realized the risk she was running. She would dodge her snake, and quick as lightning seize it the moment it was off its guard, shake it with great violence, and with a jerk throw it aside, thus generally managing to break its back. In the long run, however, she was bitten on no less than four occasions, twice by a puff-adder and twice by a yellow-cobra, the two most deadly reptiles in the Karroo. When such a misadventure occurred, we would get her to the house with all speed, tie a cord round her neck; but not so tightly as to seriously impede her breathing. Then a stoutish piece of wood was thrust crosswise between her teeth and well back in the mouth, and was lashed to the back of the head. This was to prevent her jaws closing on the hand of the operator, as she was always bitten either on the mouth or the nose. Then a gash was made, by means of a knife, across the puncture of the snake-bite. Next, by a firm pressure around and behind the wound, the envenomed and sluggish black blood was forced out through the incision, and the process was continued until the gory stream flowed its thin and normal red. The cord and the stick were then removed, and she was given a dish of milk to drink, which was supposed to be an additional remedy. If the urgency of the case appeared to demand it, a dose of Cape-brandy was also administered. It served to quicken the circulation, and no doubt, if taken in time, it was a valuable aid. Once, when Vixen was being operated on, an artery was severed in making the incision, and the continuous flow of the blood had to be staunched with cobweb till a bar of iron was heated at the forge, and the vein was sealed up by a touch of the red-hot metal.

I well remember when first she was bitten. It was by a puff-adder, and I actually saw the snake catch her with its fang on the nose as she was in the process of seizing it. She was not yet three years old, and it was her first kill in this line. After the operation, her head had swollen to double its normal size, the eyes being nearly closed up, and the mouth twisted to one side of the face. The whole effect was ghastly and grotesquely comical. Yet, if she heard the rumble of cart-wheels, or the passing of strange footsteps, she would lift up her head and bark as she always did, for she was an excellent watch-dog, till long after the disturbing sounds had travelled out of hearing. At such times her appearance was extraordinary beyond words, and almost beggars description. Try to imagine a shapeless object, only to be identified as a head, in that the same was attached to the body of a dog, and the muchly diminished orifice (in that same head) that had once been a mouth, and still could only be a mouth, though it was removed a matter of inches out of its rightful location—imagine that head and that mouth in active service, and vigorously and noisily barking away at anything and everything that came along and that could possibly be barked at, and you might come within a hundred miles of realizing the horridest, funniest, absurdest, most unique and unheard of sight that surely ever mortal eye chanced to look upon—a sight that might have amazed some and appalled others but would certainly have arrested the attention of the most unemotional and the most phlegmatic with thunderstruck astonishment!

In her domestic duties she was most zealous and true to her instincts. I suppose that in all she had some eight litters of puppies—three in the first lot, and later as many as seven. She invariably retired to the river-bank, a hundred yards from the house, for privacy, and she dug a spacious and comfortable cavity under the roots of a mimosa bush, to serve as a secure and snug retreat for the little ones till they were able to run about and begin to take care of themselves. When too many came along at one time, the puppies were taken away before their eyes had opened, and a selection was made of three or four males. These were carried back to their shelter, the mother instantly following. She seemed to grasp the situation, and to realize, with due resignation, the stern necessity of the case. The poor little rejected innocents were of course destroyed. A real good mother too she proved. Right worthily she minded her wee "babbies," protected them from harm, fed them—bringing them odds and ends of bones and pieces of meat, when their needs grew to beyond the milk that her own body could supply, and trained them. But she permitted no liberties or undue familiarities, as they soon found out, and they mended their ways accordingly.

She had not a lazy bone in all her sound, useful and splendid body. For nearly twelve years we had her. When grown old, she still hunted to her full strength. Often she got into a steep hole in trying to follow some animal, and had to be pulled out, for her powers were on the wane. The end came, as inevitably it must; but it was shrouded in mystery.

She had accompanied my brother into the remoteness of the great mountain. Stay at home and claim exemption on account of her cumulative years—not she! Remain behind in idleness and ease and assert the well-merited and fully earned leisure of old age—no! She was made of other and better clay, and cast in a different and a finer mould. In the forenoon of the last fateful day, she had killed a large snake. For an hour or two afterwards she was still hunting around, and was last seen near the edge of a precipice. So far as was known the snake had not bitten her, besides which she had become almost proof against the venom. Moreover, she was running about in apparent health too long after the encounter for anyone to reasonably connect the snake with her disappearance. She might have slipped over the rocks in trying to reach a rock-rabbit on the brink of the abyss, or even more likely still, she may have endeavoured to get at some animal in an awkward cavity, and failed, for want of strength, to get out again. Anyway, we never saw her more since that day.

She was a worker, and she died in harness. She was as game as they make them to the last! The rugged Karroo mountain that holds her bones is likewise her monument, and Nature's grand and giant emblem of that which is strong, steadfast, enduring, everlasting!

CHAPTER XII

BAHA-A !

HE was one of two. They were twin brothers. One was taken and the other was left. It was judged that two were more than the mother could conveniently or economically rear. So he was handed over to me on condition that I became responsible for his minding, keeping and nourishment. I was to fulfil, in fact, the duties of a foster parent. To help make provision, I was allowed the use of a nanny-goat whose kid had died or had been weaned. I entered upon my responsibilities forthwith. Every morning and each evening I caught the goat and put my charge in position for her to suckle. Nanny had, of course, to be held fast by her horns and beard. She would not submit tamely to the indignity of yielding up her milk for the support of a waif and a stranger, and as such, not even one of her own kind. No doubt she regarded it as an outrageous contamination. But her wishes and feelings were neither consulted nor considered, and for some four months upwards the process was continued.

Meanwhile my adopted lamb just wandered around the homestead of a day, along with another half-dozen orphans, who had also their duly appointed guardians, and for whose welfare I was not personally answerable—feeding, as his necessities increased, upon the herbage within reach. It was a good season, and there was plenty of young grass and succulent bush. But a little after the period of one hundred and twenty odd days had run its course, the first chapter of his life was brought to a close. We had arrived at the time when the serious course of weaning became imperative. In company with his fellows in affliction, he was put along with a large flock to graze in the distant veld. The flock was driven off to the outstation, some nine miles away, and after that I did not see my pet more than once, or sometimes twice a year. That was on the occasion either of the annual shearing, or of the periodical dipping, when the flock was driven back to the homestead for the purpose.

I shall never forget his hearty and lusty " baha-a," and I could have picked out his voice amongst a thousand. It was nearly half a century ago, yet green and kindly memory brings back the dear, familiar notes, and imagination, the richest and most wonderful of Heaven's gifts, clearly reproduces the pleasant, full-throated sound of his clarion call.

Each spring-time he yielded his ample fleece, full measure, weight and worth. He was well grown, and of goodly proportions. Whenever he heard my hail, he would come running up, and have me stroke his head and back, the wagging of his stump of a tail testifying to his appreciation of the caress. If a nanny-goat happened near, I would catch it, and call to him as in bygone days to take his drink, and though it was years afterwards he would respond by circling round the goat in a state of great excitement, uttering his usual bleat, dropping on his knees as if to partake, but instantly jumping up again and running around as before. He was getting on in life ; but the time of his youthful days still stirred in his brain when the associations were thus vividly renewed.

And so time rolled on, and the seasons slipped by until seven summers were counted. This was the allotted span of a sheep's usefulness in life as it is reckoned in the Great Karroo. He had thus far been privileged, and had mercifully escaped the usual fate of being sold to the butcher buyers. Now, however, were he longer spared, the worn teeth would fail to crop a sufficiency of herbage to keep him in condition. Bodily deterioration would ensue, and he would be unable at the last to comply with the requirements of his mission in life—to bring up the looked for profit to the farmer. It was also a period of drought, and prime sheep were scarce. He was brought to the homestead, one among a lot of fifty, to provide for the household table. They were all herded with the "milk-goats," and every evening I looked in at the kraal and stroked him as he loved to have me do. At my intercession he was spared as long as possible. But daily the little flock dwindled, as ours was a large family, and there were also the servants and all the farm hands to feed. A little later there were only three victims left, and after that I did not go to see him any more. It was too much. He gave up his very life and its covering of skin. It was his all, the supreme sacrifice! There was nothing more that he could give. How ruthless and cruel Nature seems at times! How dreadful and sombre her garb, when she dictates the law of necessity, which itself knows *no* law, but relentlessly and remorselessly enforces its inexorable decrees! Yet one cannot change the unchangeable, nor, even in thought, supply anything to take its place. My pet was but a sheep, and his fate was fore-ordained from the beginning. Right worthily he lived his humble, simple life, and honestly played his part. As a sheep he paid his yearly tribute, a splendid, golden fleece. As a sheep he was in due time led to the slaughter, submissive, uncomplaining, and he uttered not a sound. And so he passed into the great silence, and was heard no more. But keep my memory green, dear Lord, I hear him yet!

CHAPTER XIII

JACK

HE was taken from his nest in a belt of mimosa and karree trees, away out on the expanse of the Karroo flats. Not more than seven suns of the early summer had passed over his head. A queer object he looked, all beak, head, and throat, with an insignificant little body attached—a mere appendage! Only a few fringe-like signs of feathers showed here and there in various isolations. For the rest he was bald. The "ugly duckling" was a dream of beauty by comparison. The subject of the theme, at this stage, was the incarnation of the absurd and the grotesque. His identity would have mightily puzzled the uninitiated in Nature's feathered (?) mysteries. Three times a day I fed him on pieces of raw meat, cut up to the size of walnuts or larger, with a few occasional worms between meals by way of variety, and as a healthful aid to digestion. He would take his food at a gulp, accompanied by the queerest sounds ever produced by a little baby-bird, for he would emit a continuous repetition of discordant and horrible squawks, and in his eagerness half your thumb and nearly all your forefinger would disappear down his capacious throat before you could liberate the morsel. His appetite was colossal, and the manner of his feeding prodigious and more interesting than edifying or refining. He grew apace. You almost seemed to see the process, although you could not actually hear it. Anyway, you could hear him feed. You were safe to do that at a full hundred yards away! There was no doubt on this point, unless it happened to blow a gale from the opposite quarter. Within four months he was hopping around the place with wings extended, decently and creditably clad in a covering of glistening jet-black. When five months had passed, the pinions of one wing had to be clipped to prevent him from flying about and getting into or causing trouble. With an answering caw, he made immediate response when his name was called. Daily he followed me, hopping along and using legs and wings to keep up the pace, and eagerly he would enter with me into the garden, when I went spade in hand to turn over a few inches of earth, and provide him with a grateful and royal feast on the embedded worms. These he devoured with avidity and with many appreciative and cawing comments to mark his thorough enjoyment of the luxurious fare.

The cats soon learned to dread him as a formidable antagonist. And well they might, though he did not interfere until one of them came too close, which he looked upon as an unwarrantable trespass. Then erect would go his feathers, till they formed one huge ruffle, very fierce would become his mien, and suddenly he would appear transformed to double his ordinary size. One warning gurgle he would give, and if that were not paid instant heed to, he would make a most violent and impetuous onslaught with beak and claws, and in a trice the discomfited delinquent would be scampering off for dear life, the most confused, scared and astonished cat in the country.

Like many others of the bird-kind, he loved to have the back of his head gently scratched. He was very docile, and it was wonderful what liberties you could take with him, if you went quietly and the right way about it. I used to lay him on his back on the upper end of a see-saw plank, take a tablespoon, a knife and a fork, and place one of the articles in his beak and one in each claw. I then gently bumped the lower end of the plank, and he would come sliding down, uttering protesting caws, but retaining his position and holding on to the goods, till, as generally happened, he went over the side, when he dropped the lot in endeavouring to save himself and make a secure landing. Yet he was always willing to submit to a repetition of the experiment, and very laughable it was. Little items like these served, in the aggregate, to brighten greatly the monotony of life on a South African farm. I should think that anyone with a natural and healthy mind would agree to that!

Very droll and peculiar were his antics and his audible self-communings as he wandered around and took stock of the various objects that came in his way. Like the rest of his tribe he was of an inquiring disposition, and highly inquisitive withal.

One day as he was strutting along, he happened on the body of a dead heron. At once he stiffened into an attitude of intense alertness. His interest and curiosity were excited to concert pitch. Round and round the object of his discovery he walked, turning and tilting his head this way and that, viewing it frontally, sideways, obliquely, with both optics, or one, first the right, then the left, making comments and remarks gradually increasing in volume of number and sound. Rapidly his excitement grew, till he worked himself into a perfect frenzy, and finally executed a wild war-dance. He became vociferous and turned on the full battery of his vocabulary, raising a din you could have heard half a mile away. The translation of his harangue was a matter for the imagination. It was no doubt rich in adjectives, but polluted by many cuss-words. Let us make due allowance for the ecstasy of his furore, which carried him away, and not hold him too strictly to account. He had fallen into a condition of irresponsibility, and there was no allaying the excess of his transport, until the cause of it was removed.

I could tell you a deal more of his quaint ways and queer doings; but perhaps what I have said will suffice. His fate was cruel and tragic in the extreme. I picked him up one afternoon near the garden gate with his poor skull all crushed and one eye knocked out, the murderous bar of iron with which the wicked deed was done lying on the ground a little way off. I never knew who did it. I was not told, and it was well I did not know.

It was hard to forgive a thing like that, because it was even harder to forget. It is said that if a man steals your purse he steals trash. If he besmirch your good name, you can at the worst live it down. Nearly all injury can be repaired. Injustice may be rectified, or atoned for. But to strike down an innocent life that no man can give and none can restore—that is beyond reparation, and impossible of rectification or atonement. I was but a child, yet it was in my heart to seize that instrument of death and slay the author of the bloody deed.

Poor Jack! At a weak spot in the thorn-hedge he had got over into the garden, and had dug a hole with his beak under the roots of a tall mealie plant in search of his favourite worms. It was averred that he might get in again and destroy the mealies and also the peas! One little thorn branch would have repaired the defect in the hedge, and the destruction of a valuable life was the more frightful in its utter needlessness.

Poor old Jack! How remorselessly he was destroyed in the midst of his pleasant, harmless and beautiful life! Black as a pall he was, my gentle, genial rook; black was the day, and blacker still his tragic, hapless fate! But blackest of all was the hand that wrought the dark and evil work!!

CHAPTER XIV

TOM

IN repose, he was a whitish-grey ball, and resembled nothing more closely than a large powder-puff. He was entirely covered with a soft, feathery fluff, looked nice and warm and comfortable, and also felt agreeable to the touch. It was only when he began to stir, raised up his perfectly round head, lifted his beautifully curved beak from off his breast, and opened his large, round, staring eyes, that the nature of his identity began to dawn upon you. That is, of course, if you were at all familiar with the general appearance of his kind.

He was taken off the ledge against a high sandbank that marked the dry watercourse, which in the Great Karroo is known as a river, but whose only running streams were those of the occasional storm-water flood. But at such times, the same streams were often mad, awesome, irresistible torrents, carrying destruction and death in their headlong rush. It was on the banks of such a channel that his parents chose to establish themselves. Sometimes, however, they would pick upon a rocky projection at the base, or lower altitude, of a mountain, and at other times the cavity or hollow trunk of a tree. But shelters of the latter sort were rarer, as the mimosa and the karree were not of a girth large enough, nor of a nature favourable for the formation of these dug-outs. The life of the trees would moreover scarcely run to it, as the biggest were too frequently ring-barked, or cut down for utility purposes.

The parent birds built no nest. Their round, ivory-white eggs—two at a time—were deposited in the shallow depression scraped with their claws. Such was the home from which our friend was abducted.

We fed him mainly on mice, the smaller of which he would swallow whole. He had an ample throat! The larger ones were dissected so as not to strain his capacity. If a supply of these was not available, pieces of raw meat were substituted. Not infrequently he had a change of diet, when a few young sparrows figured in the bill. They were taken from neighbouring nests, so as also to check the undue increase in their number, and the consequent interference with the crops. Our charge thrived well, and his growth was rapid. In a few months he was on the wing—we did not clip his pinions, there was no need. Being entirely carnivorous, he could not injure the garden crops. He did not worry the chicks and ducklings. He had grown up amongst them, and in a way they were his pals. And if he grew forgetful or absent-minded, and developed any cannibalistic tendencies, there were the hen-mothers to protect them.

He flew around and about the homestead keeping within a radius of two hundred yards, and seldom, if ever, ventured beyond that distance. To a great extent he was now doing for himself; but he was allowed some perquisites when he put in an appearance to claim them. Of a day, he usually sat dozing away in some sheltered nook. If you wanted him, you only had to call—"Tom"! when promptly you would hear his answering "Sh-sh-sh!" and here he would come flying along to ascertain your wishes, or to know if you had any little surprise-packet in store for him.

His dread aversion was the house-swallows. If he ventured into an exposed spot, they would swoop down and jeer at him with their eternal "tweet-tweet," often biffing him on the head with their bodies. He would duck violently to avoid them, sometimes nearly executing a somersault in his panic. He would cut and run for the nearest hiding-place—anywhere—to get away from their taunts and persecutions.

On a wintry day you might see him ensconced against the sheltered and sunny side of the river-bank, his most favourite spot. By and by some sound would disturb him, and wide open would go his large, round eyes. Suddenly he would espy a beetle, or some other object that puzzled him and aroused his curiosity. His head would start revolving, but his eyes would remain intently fixed on the centre of attraction. Slowly he would advance, step by step, the circlings of his head quickening, but the circumference diminishing in inverse ratio, until he reached the spot. If the find proved a frost, he discarded it ; but if a genuine article, he would take it up in his beak, march back to his roost, and examine the prize at leisure, devouring the same if it proved edible. For there were certain of the larger insects that he had also learned to include in his more extended menu.

He grew into a very fine bird, and we had him for two years. Then, one luckless morning, Tom failed to answer the roll-call. Search was made ; but he was nowhere to be seen. On the afternoon of the day following, I found him lying on his face with wings outspread, stone dead. The cause of his untimely demise was not ascertained. He had died not far from his old favourite haunt on the river-bank. Though his career was quite uneventful, his life was altogether harmless. Would that we, the vaunted lords of creation, could say as much of ourselves !

An owl is oft-times accounted the wisest of birds ; at other times he is set down as the most foolish, according to the capricious humour of the writer, or as his convenience may dictate. Our Tom was certainly not the one, nor, I am most sure, was he the other ! BUT HE WAS GOOD !

CHAPTER XV

THE HEPTARCHY

THERE were seven of them. They were taken from the mimosa trees on the far side of the river, and transferred to the household establishment. A goodly sized peach-tree branch was cut, and was suspended, by means of a piece of string, from the lintel of one of the dining-room windows. On this branch they were liberated, and left to shift for themselves, and make their own arrangements. They were by no means a sociable fraternity. So, after a lot of shuffling and reshuffling, each partook himself to his own particular twig, and there hung out his sign, and took up his quarters till further orders. From day to day, however, a new order was arbitrarily and peremptorily issued, and further orders followed automatically in its train. One of them, by superior assertive power, exercised a natural ascendancy over his fellows. So, when the spirit of adventure came upon him, he promptly packed up and made tracks for another twig. Unless that other twig happened to be a vacant lot, the startled occupant of the invaded territory speedily took to flight, and was next looking for asylum in an adjacent kingdom. If all went well, and *he* again encountered a weaker will, he would find the throne conveniently vacated. But the holder of the sceptre might refuse to abdicate, and the fugitive had to pass on and continue his quest into lands beyond. And so the reshuffling would be resumed, the cards again be cut, and a new deal take place, the excitement growing the while, until the whole branch became agitated by the advances and retreats of the several contestants.

The disturbance of the world's peace at times assumed serious proportions, spreading to the furthest limits, and prolonged was the commotion till every monarchy tottered, before the Great War terminated, and the new demarcations were adjusted. Sometimes a panicky refugee, finding his road barred by a formidable adversary, would lose his foothold in sheer trepidation, and be precipitated off the face of the earth (peach-branch). On such an occasion, the poor outcast would be reclaimed from the nether regions, and be replaced on a vacated twiggery by the intervention of a superior power. Thus the Heptarchy reigned for some months, with constant change and interchange of thrones; but territorial disputes gradually abated, political questions grew less acute, things calmed down, and, in the latter days, the blessings of peace prevailed over all lands. Beyond this, there were no events of importance.

The erstwhile candidates for thrones, having wearied of their vain ambitions, were now able to pay more attention to their domestic duties, and to devote a fuller time to the legitimate calling of fly-catching. In the warm, sunny weather, they grew wonderfully content and well satisfied with their new leisure in life. They would lie perfectly still and flat in one spot, dressed in the colour of their immediate surroundings, so that they were not easily discernible, and their presence would not be noticed by the prey they silently awaited. In a state of suspended animation, almost as in the lethargy of death, they would remain, though it were a full half hour, till a hapless fly, or other insect, alighted in a favourable position, and within a nine-inch range. Then suddenly, a tongue of deadly red flame would flash forth, and in a moment the victim was in the jaws of his captor, was briefly masticated and swallowed, and again the sniper lay concealed in uncanny silence, awaiting another mark!

I have stood, or sat, and watched them many a day. When the flies came along fast, the catches were good, and the feasting in proportion; but the unfortunates were not confined to flies, although the latter formed the vast majority. Moths put in an appearance, some larger than a shilling, and a good deal plumper, also to meet their fate. It only took a few more chaws to reduce them to a fit condition to be gulped. Various others—grasshoppers occasionally, likewise butterflies, and even the eccentric mantis would venture along when the sultry thunderweather was about—all of them to fall into the toils of the dreadful devourer, and find out their mistake when it was too late!

Nine inches, possibly ten at times, was the limit to which the elastic, red-tongued weapon of the catchers could carry; but their operations were normally confined to shorter ranges. Once in a while a fly would actually alight on the back, or even on the head of his foe, and there he would sit washing his face, combing his hair and whiskers, and finally polishing his boots. But in this position he was perfectly safe, as the enemy was powerless to act. Mr. Fly was in fact occupying a point of vantage! To all which the "man below" seemed to remain stolidly indifferent.

The fly-catchers were worshippers of the sun and lovers of the warmth, and were not at all happy at the approach of cold weather. When the frosts arrived, then "hands," feet and legs got dreadfully chapped, and their discomfort was thus greatly increased. Their sufferings became more and still more severe, and eventually I took a small cardboard box and a bunch of cotton-wool, and every evening I wrapped each of them in a piece of the soft material, and laid them alongside one another in a row, like sardines, also placing a strip of the wool over them; I then adjusted the lid of the box, and put away the latter in a snug place for the night. When the sun grew warm the following morning, they were unpacked and bestowed on their various lodgments on the branch. Thus I minded them till the return of summer. They would surely not have survived otherwise. In their wild state they would have gone into winter quarters—*hibernated*—as do other reptiles and animals who are out of their element when Jack Frost rules the land, and thus have met the difficulty in the way that Nature had taught them.

The days of tribulation passed. Once more there was warmth and cheer and plenty. Under the influence of the genial weather, and the improved and more generous fare, the fly-catchers soon lost their "chaps," and their sores were healed. They were having a good time, and they grew sleek and fat. But Nemesis was at hand. The source of their prosperity was to prove their undoing. Alas! The very joybells of fair weather and good times likewise tolled the solemn knell of their doom! The flies came along unusually thick and fast. They were an intolerable nuisance, and their burdensome numbers were such that the feeders could make no impression on them. Additional means were considered and adopted to cope with the situation. Tin-plates were placed on the window-sills, with fly-paper in them. Diluted and sweetened arsenic poison was poured on the paper. The new aid proved powerfully effective. The pestering insects perished rapidly and fell in thousands. No thought had been given to the obvious danger threatening the Heptarchy. But soon—within a couple of hours or thereabouts—things began to go awry in the seven kingdoms. One after another a reigning monarch loosed his hold on the throne, and was precipitated into the unknown. Two hours more and the peach-branch world was entirely depopulated, and like our own beautiful satellite became a place of the uttermost desolation. The ill-fated deceased had caught and eaten flies that had partaken of the deadly poison, and these same flies, now doubly sentenced to death, had their sufferings cut short, and had fallen victims to the lesser peril. Such was the pathetic and tragic fate of my poor, hapless fly-catchers. It was a perfect and dreadful holocaust. I have not kept chameleons since !

CHAPTER XVI

THE TRIUMVIRATE

THEY constituted a trio, and a merry lively little lot they were. They had been denizens of this world but for a few short weeks, when they were captured, and carried off to the headquarters of the homestead, as youthful prisoners of war.

A colony of them had been surprised, while celebrating and holding high revelry at one of their picnics, a little way from their stronghold. The young ones had been taken alive, and the surviving elders had scampered back to their earthwork fortifications.

They soon became reconciled to their nominal captivity. They were well treated, and there were abundant compensations. Life was less strenuous, and they had protection from many perils that had beset them in their former freedom. There was security, and there was peace and plenty. They quickly grew tame and docile. You could take them on your lap, and though they pretended to bite your hands with their little sharp teeth, they took good care not to hurt you.

A gay, light-hearted crew they were, without a care in the world, living the day long, just for its cheer and its brightness! All through the hours they ran in and out and round about the house, chevying one another in play. They also chased after the other animals that were on the move, thus lending an appearance of reality to the pleasant fiction of their gallantry.

Further to work off superfluous energy, they dug holes under the foundations of the buildings. This practice became a nuisance, and the excavations had to be constantly refilled. The tunnels would soon have extended beneath the house, and with the happy trio making midnight sport under the bedroom floors, there would have been an end to refreshing sleep.

Their yellowish, grey-besprinkled coats rendered them difficult to see among the drab bushes and the red-brown stones in the veld. So does nature help to shield her children.

A drink of goats' milk they enjoyed as a great luxury; but they also loved the flesh-pots, and devoured meat either raw or cooked. And they liked their game, the bag embracing mice, small birds, lizards, snakes, locusts, grasshoppers, and some other insects. They flourished exceedingly. You heard their soft "Meer-meer-meer!" as they wandered their ways, frequently sitting erect on their hind-quarters, turning their heads from side to side with quick, jerky movements, and looking alertly round with their inquisitive, black-lidded, sharp, bright eyes. They were built on generous lines as regards their rear ends, and had strong tails, so that they squatted in easy and natural posture, and looked their best and smartest in this attitude.

As they arrived at maturity, they became bold and aggressive towards other animals of whose acquaintance they had not the pleasure. They resented, and even combated the intrusion of such, especially if they failed to conduct themselves with decorum. Many a stranger dog learnt this, and the knowledge came not without tribulation. It happened thus:

Mr. Dog suddenly espying one or more of the Triumvirate, and having hitherto only met their kind on the veld, where he had pursued, and sometimes caught and killed them, advanced to make inquiries. There was not much doubt as to his real intention and ultimate object. But before he could seize a potential victim, one of the alert trio, whose sharp eyes had already marked the intruder, slipped under him and grabbed him in the groin. As the astonished dog turned with a yelp to free himself of his diminutive assailant, the latter's two companions instantly sailed in, and fastened their razor-like teeth in other tender and inconvenient parts of the enemy's anatomy. In less time than it takes to tell, the erstwhile inquirer after novelty was howling in the agony and terror of his surprising discoveries, and in a minute would be seen the extraordinary spectacle of a huge dog, running for his life, with the gallant Lilliputians in pursuit!

It did not always fare so well with the three braves. On one occasion the leader lost an eye, and nearly forfeited his life in the fray. But it did not quench his spirit, nor check his prowess, and he was bold as ever, when he recovered.

But the position was untenable. The Triumvirate could not continue to assert their authority without the necessary backing. When it became seriously challenged, the bold Lilliputians were unable, for want of reinforcements, to maintain the full exercise of their imperious rule. Like other misfortunes, the stranger dogs did not always come along singly. The trio could rule one dog all the time. It was not so easy to govern two dogs together, and at one time. In the case of a pack of dogs they were faced with hopeless odds. So it went hard with the plucky little warriors, but they were dauntless, and they met their fate gloriously.

They could not die with their boots on, because they did not wear any ; but they were clad from head to heel in the courage that knew no fear, and in that imperishable armour they faced Death. First one, then another, fell in magnificent battle with their formidable and giant antagonists, and the vivid wonder of their lives passed away into prosaic history. Yet their doughty, dare-devil deeds may ever and worthily dwell in poetical imagination. Like smaller, and also greater things, the happy, mercurial trio ran their last course, and arrived at the final goal. The three little "Meer-cats" were no more ! But they loom large in my recollection, with their quaint ways, their brisk alertness, and their gallant exploits—the tiny, restless, merry trio—the bold and fearless Lilliputian Trumvirate, whose rule was imperious!

N.B.—The "Mongoose" is championed as a snake killer. There is no occasion to assign a monopoly of this virtue (?) to him. Our little "Meer-cats," and our "Muishonds"—*Mousedogs* or Skunks—destroy many snakes. They are as fearless and as expert as the Mongoose, and slay the reptiles in the same way; but their legitimate claims in this regard have not been asserted or recognized, and are hardly known.

No doubt the "Meer-cat" is named from the soft-sounding "meer, meer, meer," that he ceaselessly emits as he moves restlessly to and fro.

CHAPTER XVII

PIET & CO.

PIET was the first arrival. The days of his pilgrimage had accumulated to the number of one and half a score, a little more than the life of a moon. His most noticeable features were his big head—fine, large, brilliant eyes—small, round, fluffy body—and a pair of long, strong, yellowish legs. These last he used effectively, and he ran at considerable speed.

His voice was heard in pleasing, clear, liquid notes, very cheerful and rousing, and carried to a surprising distance. His call was always promptly responded to by his feathered friends within hail. His kind loved to roam about the veld in the dark hours, especially when there was the smell and the touch of rain in the air, and their cry was accepted by the shepherds as the harbingers' glad tidings of refreshing showers, and as such was very welcome in a thirsty land. Out on the wide plains too, in the long nights, the happy, heartening sounds helped to dissipate the dreariness and depression of the lonely hours, and made them feel less lonely.

Piet's diet was varied. As a vegetarian, he ate bread-crumbs, corn, and other small grain, many sorts of seeds, and the leaves of different bushes. But he was very partial to the flesh-pots, and his meat bill covered an array of items—caterpillars—leaving out the ranker sorts—worms, flies, moths, grasshoppers, etc. ; nor did he disdain pieces of raw mutton if his belly cried for more. He was a hearty feeder, but not voracious, and you could hardly have called him greedy.

He thrived well in his body, but was oppressed by the melancholy of isolation, till two youths of his school were added to bear him happy company. These wore a lighter-shaded covering than Piet, and were half a moon younger, though they were hardly less in size. But from the first, Piet, by priority and seniority, assumed the lead, and took the new arrivals under his patronizing and protecting wing. It was, however, a well-meaning and benevolent patronage, designed for their welfare. He took pride in his new-found friends, and was genuinely desirous of serving them.

They grew rapidly. For a while they were kept on a grass-plot, in an enclosure, at the side of the house, where there were also a few young almond trees to shade them from the noonday sun, as it was now nearing mid-summer. As they became bigger, their quarters got too cramped for their activities. More space was necessary, both for their health and for their happiness. They were granted the freedom of the homestead. They wandered over the whole extent of the grounds, and were now able to do a bit for themselves. They did not quite earn their living, but they contributed considerably towards it, and made additions to their already lengthy bill of fare, for they loved variety.

The autumn was approaching, and we had had them for upwards of six months. They were of age! verging on the full vigour of birdhood, and had nearly attained to the perfection of their physical charms. They were dressed in their best, but they were modest. They eschewed tawdry tinsel and gaudy colours. These were well enough for the giddy throng, who dwelt in the world of woods and of waters, and who loved gay feathers. They cared not for these things, the plain ones of the plains. They preferred the sober tones and quiet tints of the veld. They liked to be in harmony and in sympathy with their surroundings, and to accord with the fashions of the great feathered, and the furry and hairy fraternity, that were in vogue on the wide flats in the Karroo.

Piet remained the acknowledged champion of his party, and stood up loyally in their defence. If they were threatened, he came forward fearlessly in their cause. He once lost his right eye to a young cat, that was merely a little curious, and had approached too close. But Piet distrusted all cats, and he "sailed in" to the attack with disastrous result. However, there were no other serious injuries, and he recovered from the dreadful wound. He was more full of fight than ever after that.

It was comical to see him advance, in pugnacious attitude, one shoulder drawn up an inch higher than the other, and his feathers all ruffled. His mien was fierce and he looked quite formidable! If you wished to tease him, you could make him furiously angry by flicking your handkerchief in his face. Stung by the insult, he would advance and seize the fabric in his beak. Then you could drag him along for yards, or swing him clean off his feet, but he would hold on! But it was unwise to overdo it, for he took it seriously, and it was not fun to him. In combat he also used his wings, and got in his left and right with smart raps. Though he was puny, and his onslaughts were harmless, they yet served to keep off intruders.

When Piet & Co. attained to the full prosperity of their firm, they became less dependent on home support. They gradually extended their operations further afield. We only saw them twice a week, later they were seldom in view, till at last, we only heard them as they hailed one another in the warm summer evenings, or saluted their friends when the pleasant smell of rain arose from the earth, or floated in the air. Finally we saw them no more, though at night their cheery notes at times yet relieved the loneliness. So they quietly left us and went away into the wild. The call of the veld had come to them, impelling and irresistible.

Why did we not clip their wings? They had their strong legs, which would have carried them miles in a few hours. Besides, we should have left them at the mercy of their enemies, the recreant dog, the vigilant cat, the pouncing hawk, the alert skunks and meer-cats, and other things of evil.

They effected the parting gently. Pleasant company had they been, our welcome plovers, the dear little rain-birds. They had been no trouble at all! Their memory is sweet—a bright golden link. They were neither the last nor the least of our many pets. I still picture them skimming softly and swiftly in their evening flight. I see them running along evenly and gracefully, with their pretty, spotted, and speckled bodies, on their strong, sturdy legs, stopping for a moment to bob their fine heads in greeting. I hear the clear, liquid notes of their call. They tell me, that though the night cometh, the morning also cometh. The gracious message is refreshing to the soul, and it strengthens the heart. I think of the wide veld, and the great mountains beyond. I hear them calling, calling, and in fancy there come to me many once dear familiar voices that now dwell in the Great far Beyond!

The bright day departeth and the night cometh—
Grim Watchman, what of the drear darkening night?
The black night too passeth, the morning cometh—
Little rain-bird, what of the glorious morn?

CHAPTER XVIII

PORKER

HE was a transfer from a neighbouring farm, or from the Dorp thirty miles away, and was said to be one of a litter of seven. He was eight weeks old when he came, a plump, yellowish-haired body, with dark patches, and bore a pleasant, comfortable, farm-yard sort of an appearance. He had a hearty appetite, and was not fastidious or particular as to his fare, so long as it tasted good and went down well. Sour milk, butter milk, or pieces of pumpkin, potato peelings, vegetable odds and ends, and scraps of meat, all boiled up together in one great hotch-potch—none of it did he deem unclean.

When he grew bigger, he strayed down to the river-banks, and nosed out the giant chrysalides that hold the large moths, so destructive, with their progeny, to our thorn belts. He found them in the sandy soil, by the roots of the mimosa. It was the savoury meat, such as his stomach loved. He liked the quest, it kept him busy, and you could see the furrows of his extensive ploughing beneath the trees.

He was well content with his new home. He developed quickly, and in growth soon overtook his larger companions. Though yet very young, he was early appointed the leader of his party. It seemed premature ; but Nature smiled on the election. His stature and assertiveness fitted him for the post. He equipped himself for the task with a pair of fine, sharp, curved, ivory tusks. These he displayed with pride and with prominence on his first birthday. But pride goes before a fall, and although Porker had a good innings, his fall was yet to come, though, as the vulgar saying goes, he gave them a good run for their money.

As his tusks increased in size, and the pride of leadership grew upon him, he became addicted to strange eccentricities mainly harmless, and those who knew him did not take him seriously ; but the lesser acquainted were afraid of concealed liabilities, and feared sinister designs. They regarded him with uneasiness, and tried to avoid him. At his approach the timid ones took to flight. If you were not noticing, he would sidle up stealthily, and wait for you to get a move on. While you stood your ground, he would pretend to be concerned about other matters, mere camouflage, to throw you off your guard. When you walked off, he would follow close at your heels. If you broke into a run, he would charge after you, and make believe to be chasing you away. If you did not run fast enough, he might overtake and upset you. But he did not hurt anybody, nor did he interfere with the children on the farm.

One morning he wandered down to the washing-place, where the coloured woman was busy scouring the week's accumulation of dirty clothes. She was kneeling on a large flat stone at the water edge, kneading the soaped-in garments. Next to her was a four-gallon iron bucket, containing some smaller articles and a bar of soap. Porker nosed around till he came upon the receptacle, took a sniff or two, seized hold of the prize with his teeth, and walked off with it! The woman in alarm dropped the washing, and ran to recover the property. She tried to take the bucket away; but Porker let it go and was after her. She rushed for the garden wall, and scrambled hurriedly up. She shouted to her husband, who was working near the house, for assistance. He came quickly, but was in turn charged, and also obliged speedily to mount the wall. And there stood Porker below, daring the pair of them to descend! Their joint cries for succour were answered by my brother, who cut a quince sapling, and with this weapon quickly induced the enemy to withdraw.

On another day, this imp of mischief wended his way to the quarters of our ancient thatcher. These were situated against the far side of the garden wall. The thatcher's wife was cooking the midday meal at the fire outside their room; but at a demonstration of warning by Porker, she promptly abandoned her culinary operations, and in a couple of seconds she was on top of the wall of refuge, yelling frantically for her husband. She was out of immediate danger; but the marauder upset the pots and sampled the contents. The old man, perched up aloft at his work, was an angry witness of the scene. He shouted at her to get off the wall and "drive away the —— pig!" and what was she afraid of! But it was easier to direct from his place of security than to enforce the execution of his mandate. She was "not taking any." Adventure her life to save a few victuals—not she! The ancient made a hurried descent of the roof by the ladder standing handy, borrowed the long wagon whip, and made quick time for the spot.

On his arrival, he raised his weapon to swing and crack it, so as to discomfit and disperse the aggressor; but the latter, who had taken stock of the reinforcement, suspended his looting and charged. The ancient turned and fled precipitately, and the chase becoming hot, he dropped the whip. There was not time to climb the wall, so he ran for a clump of bushes, round which he circled at his best speed, with his pursuer at his heels. The pace was too hot for the old man, and after the second lap, Porker passed under him, knocking away the support of his poor old pins. He fell backwards in the dust, and his assailant returned to finish the remainder of his interrupted meal. At this juncture, my brother, who had heard the cries and the commotion, went again to the rescue with his quince stick. This closed the adventure. The desperado was wise enough to know when to retire. He had had a rattling time, and a good dinner. It was enough!

Yet another incident figures prominently in his deeds, or, to be strictly correct, I should say his misdeeds. He was ever a seeker after novelty, and apparently loved the excitement attendant upon the quest. We had an old goat-herd named Sole, and a quaint old soul was he. He was either a widower, or an old bachelor. Anyway he had no wife to bother his life, but he had to put up with the disabilities that attached to his forlorn condition. He resided in a wattle-and-daub hut, in lonely state. It was winter time, and of a morning, before he drove his flock to the veld, he scraped the ashes over the fire in the central space of the hut, so as to cover up the live coals and prevent accident, and also to preserve those same live coals for rekindling the blaze when he returned in the evening. He closed up the doorway with a branch or two of mimosa thorn, as an effectual bar to prowling animals. But one fateful day, Porker, who had been exploring the vicinity, arrived on the spot. He found the door of the old soul's hut formidably barricaded, as stated. To one of his resourcefulness, however, that was a mere circumstance. He adjourned to the rear of the edifice, and examined the foundations. That was it! With the aid of his strong tusks, and his ever serviceable snout, he soon had an aperture large enough for admittance. It did not take long to make an inventory of the contents. The furniture was scanty, and there was little else beyond an old wooden box, with some clothes in it, and a few utensils. There was no ladies' wardrobe, no feminine fripperies; for, as I said, old Sole had no partner, fair or dark, to share his joys and divide his sorrows. In rummaging about for something to eat, the explorer pushed the box on to the hot ashes. While he was yet fossicking around, the inflammable receptacle, at first smouldering, burst into a blaze that communicated with the flimsy structure, and immediately the domicile was in flames. Whatever other people's tastes, our enterprising friend had no fancy for roast pork! He looked to his safety, and made a hurried exit through his tunnel.

Sore and loud were Sole's lamentations when he came back that evening, and very fierce was his anger. But his wrath was bootless, for he had a wholesome dread of Porker, whom he regarded as a thing of evil and a veritable son of Satan! It was rather rough on the poor old chap. Truly it is not good for a man to be alone. But there was no bachelor's tax in those days, so he was at least spared that!

Notwithstanding Porker's eccentricities, tyrannies, and general lawlessness, he also met his Waterloo. This was in the person of our little bull pug, Juno. He tried to catch her on the run one day, and caught a Tartar instead, for she rounded and grabbed him by an ear. She hung on for twenty minutes, till she was called off. Porker still indulged his favourite antics of waiting for something to get a move on, so that he might give chase. He tried it on other animals, besides humans, and he often had some fun. It was a great game of his; but he never hurt anybody. I found him easy enough to deal with. If he came up close behind me, I fetched him one on the knob with the heel of my boot by a backward thrust. This hurt, and elicited a loud

" woof " of protest—or was it a cuss-word in piggery? and he retired in discomfiture. He would have proved a regular nuisance; but his mischievous proclivities were kept in check by Juno. If he misbehaved, and she was near, you had but to call her by name, and point to the delinquent. She was at him and upon him, and all his woofs and cusses were of no avail. I have seen Porker swim the river, when the flood was moderate, in his vain and desperate efforts to shake her off. He was a large pig, and he swung her off the ground; but it was no use. One day I saw him rush into the river-pool, and stand nearly up to his nostrils and eyes in water, for more than half an hour, with his diminutive terror stuck like a leech on that unfortunate ear. Her small size was her protection. He could not reach to bite her, and he could not harm her with his tusks; for when he struck, her light body gave no resistance. The strength of the blow was dissipated in the weakness of the impact. But though the mills of the gods grind slowly, they yet do so surely and effectively, and Nemesis overtook Porker in the end. He had had a good fling, and a long and a capital innings, considering the risks that he took. And yet his greatest and most disastrous exploit was perpetrated after death! It sounds preposterous, nevertheless it is true, and he himself wrought the deed. Nonsense! you say? Wait, and you shall hear. After he had burnt down old Sole's hut, it was recognized that matters were getting serious. It was decided to put a period to his career. So he was shut up in the sty for a few weeks, to fatten. He was already in good condition, and it would not take long. Therefore, though the winter was somewhat advanced, there would yet be time for the curing of the meat.

The fatal and fateful day for his dispatch arrived. We little knew what that day held in store! On the arrival of the executioner and his henchman, Porker was instinctively aware that something was afoot, that boded him no good. In the emergency he "took sanctuary," and retreated into the inner compartment of his sty. This had a narrow entrance, and a low roof, and it only measured six feet by four in respective length and width. He was astute, for his sanctuary could not be violated even by the unscrupulous! "Whoe'er might dare to enter there," would have done so at deadly bodily peril. The quarters were too cramped. He would have been at Porker's mercy, who, in desperate mood, would not have minced matters, though he might have cut up the enemy. Every art was tried; but he would not budge. Suddenly some one suggested Juno! That was the ticket! She was fetched, put in the sty, and the door of the retreat was pointed out to her. In she rushed, and she had Porker out in a jiffy. The noose of the halter-riem (thong) was quickly round his neck, he was seized by the hind legs and thrown. The knife was applied, and in a few brief seconds Porker's days were over! He had retrograded from the comparative degree, and was now positively and finally reduced to *pork!* One might be tempted to go back further and say, that when his flesh was consumed, he was relegated to the negative state of his pre-natal period. But I am travelling in the opposite direction to that you wish me to take, for you are waiting to hear of Porker that was, and his great posthumous exploit!

He was duly scraped and cleaned, and his carcass was carried to the stone-floored outhouse—"the smithy"—to be hung upon the beam, in readiness for the cutting up. Our headman, George Holding, a powerful man, and two lusty Cape boys, were the bearers. At the entrance was a high step. The boys went first, supporting the hind quarters. Holding followed with the heavier end, having the head resting on his left forearm. As the boys mounted the step, they automatically raised the rear of the carcass, and the head slipped off Holding's arm; one of the razor-edged tusks caught in the fleshy part, and cut it to the bone, severing the main artery! It was a terrible wound, and the blood leaped in great spurts. At once we laid Holding on the bed, and made a ligature, by tying a towel tightly round the upper part of the arm. We gave him some brandy, for he was on the verge of fainting from the frightful loss of blood. Most fortunately, there happened to be a pair of horses in the stable. They were quickly harnessed, Holding was put into the cart, and was driven to the Dorp. Yet that took three and a half hours; for the road was rough, and the distance was thirty miles. An occasional gulp of brandy helped to keep him alive, for he had bled white, and I believe he fainted on the way. Luckily, the district surgeon, a capable man, was in, and prompt attention was secured.

Even so, it was a close shave ; but the patient pulled through. It looked like the hand of Providence. Had those horses not been handy—and they seldom were—had the surgeon been absent, which was usually more than likely, Holding would in either event have forfeited his life.

I could add further to Porker's escapades ; but surely this culminating piece of wickedness should proclaim a fullstop ! As a peace offering, he gave us excellent chops, grand sausages, prime hams, and capital bacon. By way of heritage, he bequeathed to us much food for thought, and material for record, as regards his queer ways, iniquitous pranks, and remarkable adventures. What more could we expect ? He was only a pig. But he was more than worthy a lively Americanism, and he most assuredly was "SOME PIG ! "

CHAPTER XIX

THE SOLITARY ALBANIAN

NOT to keep you in suspense, I shall declare myself at once. I am speaking of the white springbok. You may smile, or you may frown; but he is, or was, a fact nevertheless. A good many people have known of him; but very few have seen him, yet "when before your eyes I've set him, if you do not find him white I'll eat him!" And that would be nothing new, nor would it be any hardship, for I have already eaten him, and he tasted good! No doubt, however, he was an anomaly, and, as a *buck*, he was certainly a very rare *bird*! I have heard of only one other like him in all my life before or since.

The former one came along with a horde of "trek-bokken"—migrating bucks—on the move to pastures new. In those days of sixty years ago and more, the springboks roamed over the Karroo in thousands and scores of thousands. When a great drought was breaking up, and rains fell in certain areas, large numbers of these bucks made tracks for the favoured spots. As flock after flock converged on the way, they grew into a great company, till there might be twenty or thirty thousand, or even more, thronging together, pressing on each other, passing over hill, dale, and valley, and even traversing the great mountains, in the uncontrollable movement of their multitude, devastating the farms that lay in their course. A unit in one of these armies in bygone days, was this former white buck. In endeavouring to clear his farm of a flock of the trespassers, an uncle of mine drove a crowd of them along the top of a mountain that narrowed into an apex, and terminated abruptly in a high rocky buttress. Over this, pell-mell, went a hundred of them, and the ill-fated white springbok was among the number.

Adverting to our white buck in particular—the later one that I saw, and touched, and tasted—he was first seen, or was said to have been first seen, in the Prince Albert District, Cape Colony. But he was always on the move, and may have come from any other part of the Great Karroo. He was given no peace, and by degrees he wandered on to the plains around Beaufort West. There was a saying, based upon superstition, among the simple people, that once a man had shot a white buck, his bullets would never again fall to the ground. In other words, every one of them, after that, would find its billet. And it was useless to refute it, for there was no one who had shot a white buck! Anyway, irrespective of all beliefs, every man who handled a rifle, was fired with the ambition to bag that buck.

But more than two years passed. He had been the target for a thousand shots. It seemed as though his life were charmed. Certainly the bullets were not, for he had gone scatheless. He took no avoidable chances, however. He haunted the byways of the veld, and kept at as prudent a distance from the road as possible. But he had a hard time, and his luck could not always last. Nothing in this world can, for the times are appointed. The fateful day of our poor, harassed Albanian also arrived. I say *our*, for he fell to us !

It was early on a Saturday afternoon, in the autumn, when report was brought, that he had been seen some miles away in the veld, in a Northerly direction. My cousin and I had just ridden over from our farm to his place. We took an early cup of coffee, resaddled our horses, and were off. I carried no gun. I was but a lad, and was to assist in heading off the bucks. After a four-mile ride, I deviated from the road to turn a lot that were beyond range, and were not inclined to move. While manœuvring, I saw my cousin suddenly gallop off at a tangent, and some time later I heard him fire ; but I was too far off to see what was happening. My lot of bucks gave trouble, and it was useless to worry further with them, as the marksman had vanished. I went after him, and after a hard ride, came up as he was in the act of slinging the coveted white buck across his horse's haunches.

He had managed to get within a range of five hundred yards of the buck, and it should have been a fair mark. But the animal stood facing him, end on, and directly in a line with the lowering sun. That made it difficult indeed, yet his luck was in. The impact of the bullet was distinctly heard by the trained ear. The buck staggered slightly, and then sped away, my cousin galloping hard on his track. After a two-mile run, the pace of the buck began to falter, and he reined in his horse.

What followed, was quite natural to those used to the strategies of the veld. The weary and wounded animal availed himself of the respite, and gladly lay down. The huntsman waited for twenty minutes, for the paralyzing stiffness that would surely overtake the victim. Then he galloped to the spot. When he was within a few yards, the buck made a supreme effort, scrambled to his feet, and tried to get away. But the hunter jumped off his horse and rushed him afoot, caught him, and threw him. Then he whipped out his knife and put an end to the troubles and struggles of the wounded captive.

On examination, the prize proved to be a fine, fully developed, male springbok, all white, with a pair of good horns. There were six distinct, separate holes in the body, made by that one bullet! As the buck had stood, end on, facing the gun, the shot had gone in and out through the fleshy part of the shoulder, then passed under the skin covering of the ribs and out again, and finally through the fleshy part of the hind leg. Not a bone was broken, and the wound was by no means mortal. But for this strategic manœuvre, he would have escaped, as neither of our horses was anything to boast of, and they were both tired.

The buck had not a mark of any previous shot on his body. This was marvellous, seeing how he had run the gauntlet of innumerable guns for years. My cousin has that skin yet, I believe, the wonderful white skin with its six remarkable bullet holes, all pierced by one and the same shot. But his bullets did not fall under the mysterious charm. They fell over, short, or wide of the mark, or found their billet, accordingly as his aim and judgment were at fault or otherwise.

It was forty-two years ago; but I remember it well. I picture that stretch of stony, scrubby veld, I see the bucks running, I hear the ping of the bullet. Once more I sit astride that horse as he gallops madly to the spot. I am rejuvenated, and the sluggish blood stirs strangely and pleasantly in my veins! 'Twas but a minor part that I played, yet it is great to have been there, and it is grand to recall it. It has fallen to few to see the white buck, and it fell but to the two of us to be at the taking of this wonderful white springbok, the Solitary Albanian!

CHAPTER XX

GOBBLES

I GOT him as a tiny kitten, when his eyes had barely opened. The dogs had come unexpectedly upon the lair of the mother-cat and its progeny, beneath a large iron-stone boulder on one of the lesser ranges. When I reached the spot, they had been routed out and dispatched. But this wee mite, the sole survivor of four, had somehow been detached from the others, and overlooked in the scramble, and to that circumstance owed its miraculous escape.

He belonged to the leading species of wild cat, known as the "Graauw-Kat"—*Grey Cat*—that has a yellow coat heavily besprinkled with grey. The greyish colour prevailed on the back and upper parts and shaded off to yellow on the nether quarters, approaching to white on the belly. Its size was equal to our domestic cat; but its build was sturdier. In appearance it was identical with the latter, except in its uniformity of colouring. It belongs to the same species as our tame cats, and will mate with them. It is invariably to be found in our mimosa belts, or in the "Taaibosch"—*Tough Bush*—jungle, that lines the large dry river-banks; but it occasionally takes to the hills to seek out a secure place for the birth of its litter.

I carried the little orphan home, gave him some goats' milk in a saucer, which he licked up eagerly, and put him to bed in an empty tea-chest, among a few rags, for warmth and comfort. He did well enough, and was no trouble at all. He was soon running and playing about. Strangers did not distinguish him from the other tame kittens. When they were told that he had come from the veld, and were made acquainted with his identity, they would hardly believe it. When he grew bigger, he still had the run of the house, and he romped with the other cats that were all older than he.

He roamed freely round and about the premises, and his wild blood showed no disturbing sign. Over a piece of raw meat, he exhibited a little more excitement, and guarded it more fiercely than the average cat. He would growl and swear if a rival claimant threatened to deprive him. But so did all the cats, although they were not all so vehement, and did not swear quite so hard. He was harmless and made an excellent pet. You could take him up, and he would play with you, or lie snugly on your lap, and cosily pur his content. He never interfered with the chicks and ducklings, as we had feared that he might do. He had been among them throughout, and did not heed them. But in any event, they had the hen-mothers to protect them. He was docile, cheerful, and well behaved—all that you could have wished of any cat.

"Gobbles" he was christened, because of the avidity with which he seized upon and devoured his meat. I remember one morning, when we let a live mouse out of a wire trap for his especial benefit. He sprang eagerly upon the prey, grabbed it, and stood growling and glaring around, daring any interference. Suddenly the little captive reached round and fastened its teeth in the upper lip of the captor. Deep was the oath that Gobbles swore, followed by a loud caterwauling. He opened wide his mouth, and clawed the offender away, seized him more securely, resumed his growlings and grumblings, eased himself off with a few more swears, and decamped with his victim.

When he was verging on the stage of mature "cathood," he was accused of trying to catch the chickens. It was not true, for I should have known it as soon as any. His accuser was no lover of animals, and knew nothing of them and their ways. He misinterpreted them, for how could such as he ever know? Had Gobbles merely crouched near the chicks in play, as any cat might have done, it would have been enough to condemn him. To save his life, I agreed to have him sent to the Dorp, by a timely opportunity, as a gift to the leading butcher. He kept a few wild animals, and would no doubt be glad to have my cat as well.

The butcher was pleased. He received Gobbles kindly, and *chained him to a post in his yard!* It were far better to have knocked out his brains and have done with it. I saw him a few days later, looking most wretched. He walked the length of his chain and squatted, a heartrending picture of woeful dejection and utter desolation. I appealed for his liberty ; but was told that it was impossible, as he would get away. This was quite true ; but it would at least have given him a run and a chance. Anything would have been better than that dreadful captivity, amongst a lot of dogs and wild animals, that raised a fearful and continuous din. Fancy my poor cat, that had always been loose, and had enjoyed its freedom, chained, and encompassed by such sordid and awful surroundings, and without a friend in the world ! Within one short week, that was all too long, he pined away and died, and passed into the merciful oblivion. My good, soft, pleasant cat, that had loved his life, his home, and his freedom—poor innocent Gobbles !

CHAPTER XXI

STEENBOK

THE Boers called him " Steenbok "—Stonebuck —because of his colour. His haunts were in the vicinity of the low, stony, hill ranges, which the shade of his coat harmonized with. So long as he did not move, the eye would not easily light on him. When he came into our possession he was a little slender kiddy, a few days old. He had long, slender, graceful limbs, and fine, dark, lustrous eyes. He was a uniform, light brick-red to brown, the colouring shading off to a lighter hue on the under parts.

One of the herds had come upon him by chance with his dog, and had taken him alive before he had received any hurt. While he was yet young and frail, we kept him with us of a night in the large " wool-room," which we boys also used as sleeping quarters. He was put into an empty packing case, to shield his eyes from the candle-light, which was apt to strike a young gazelle with blindness. Each morning and evening he was allowed to suck the milk of one of the goat-ewes in the kraal immediately adjoining.

He was soon strong enough on his legs to run, and leap, and play, and was put along with the other little kids. Of a day, after the goats had been driven to the veld, he and his companions were allowed out of the kraal to run about the homestead grounds. He was as one of them, and romped, and frisked, and joined in all their fun and sport. Round and round the house they rushed, springing upon ledges and mounting on parapets, jumping upon the kraal walls and running along the tops of them, and charging up and down the dam embankments, lively and merry the glad long day.

When they were eight weeks of age they were sent to "school." They were driven off with the goats of a morning, by the herd, and went to the veld to gather knowledge of Nature. There they learnt what to eat and what to leave alone. They were taught the signs of peace and the signals of danger. They found how to divide the things that were good from those that were evil and pernicious. They experienced who were their friends, and discovered the enemies that were to be avoided. They were assisted in their inquiries by the guiding and unerring instincts that Nature had already implanted in their hearts. They also learnt to give heed to their herd, and became obedient to his directing voice.

As the sun sank low, they were turned homewards, and at the approach of the cool even, they drank at the river-pool, kneeling beside the water, in thanksgiving attitude, as they sucked up the grateful draught. Thence they were herded off to the main goat-kraal. Steenbok was given his usual ration of milk, for he was still but a little school-boy. Then he and his companions were separated from the mothers, and penned apart for the night. This ensured a supply for the household in the morning early, when the goat-ewes were milked, before the little ones rejoined them. The kiddies helped themselves during the day, while they also had the grazing of the veld, and so thrived well enough. They went daily to learn the things of the veld from the Great Book. The type was bold and clear, for it was set by Nature. The illustrations were faithful, and the artist was Truth. They imbibed the lessons that their forefathers had been taught before them; no more was required, and there was one standard of excellence to which they all attained. The system was grand in the simplicity of its perfection, and admitted of no mistakes.

Time passed; Steenbok's friends were weaned and sent away to join the flocks at the outstations. There they would complete their education, and take their final degree. But *he* stayed at home, for we wanted him. Owing to the peculiar circumstances, it was also better in his own interest, and it was safer. He might fall into danger in the large rough company if sent to the distant "university." He should stay and take his chance of qualifying at the "home school." If all went well, he might also take his degree. We might get more of his sort to bear him company, and help to smooth the way. Who could say what awaited? Meanwhile, he remained with the goat-ewes that were kept at the homestead for their milk.

In the absence of other feasible arrangements, he was admitted a member of the "grown-ups." His position was acknowledged, and the regard was mutual. He never attempted to leave them in search of his earlier companions, nor did the call of his blood lure him away into the wild. The days of his infancy had been too brief before the change. They were now remote, and if anything stirred in his little brain it was not sufficiently keen to sever the golden cords that bound him to his pleasant life.

To his previous charms, that had now matured, were also added a pair of small, elegant, slightly curved horns. It was a fine sight of a morning to see him trot in front of the goats as they left their kraal. His nimble feet always carried him to the lead. In the cool of the evening he was again at the head, as he ran, lightly and gracefully, down the steep drift to the long pool, fell gently on his knees, in his thanksgiving manner, and partook freely of the reviving water of life.

He had justified his early enrolment among the adults. He had also taken his degree! Yet there was something wanting in his life. What we had hoped for to smooth his way had not materialized, and he was without a mate. His kind were shy, and hard to take alive. The little ones were never visible. Their mothers hid them among the brown stones. They kept vigilant watch, and at the danger signal their young lay close and snug. The mother-love was resourceful, and it taught her to delude you. She saw you first, and when you became aware of her she was already far from her offspring, who kept still and awaited her return, for he knew she would come back to him.

We had had our steenbok for nearly two years, when he met with his first and last sad misadventure. It was similar to the fate which befell many of our pets on the Karroo farm.

Our old goat-herd had gone, and another was put in his place. The new herd had a dog that accompanied him to the veld. In an unguarded moment, this animal sprang upon poor Steenbok, and bit him badly before the herd could interfere. He was used to the dogs at the house, and so fell an easy prey. He was much hurt, and had to be carried home. That night he succumbed to his injuries. I am glad to say that no measures were taken against the dog, who had only done what he had been brought up to and trained to do. He was a good dog!

What purpose did our little Steenbok serve as he went daily with the goats? What good was he anyway? I will answer briefly: For two years he was a living object of pleasurable interest. We treasure the memory of him still more because of the tragedy that overtook him when he was yet so young. Ah! the pleasant recollections of a beautiful animal in a drab world! How do such as he charm away the monotony of the desert and dissipate the dreariness of the waste places? He was our gentle gazelle, that helped to brighten our lives on the lonely, far away Karroo farm. IS THAT NOTHING?"

N.B.—The skin of the steenbok is greatly prized in the Karroo on account of its combined softness and strength. It serves excellently for stitching the veld shoes, and it makes the best lash procurable there for a whip. Properly prepared, I should imagine that it would be nearly as good as chamois leather.

CHAPTER XXII

NEBUCHADNEZZAR

IT was the spontaneous idea of the moment. I cannot say how the name occurred to me. One is often as good as another. My friend was only a lizard. Perhaps his grovelling attitude, as he came out of the bush, crawling along on his belly, was dimly suggestive of poor old Nebby, when, fallen from his high estate, he was driven forth like the ox to eat grass, and when in his forlorn and desolate state he wetted his body, now so poor, and yet so recently nourished in the lap of luxury, as he stooped and grovelled to crop his food, in compliance with the stern decree of banishment. But there was no moisture in the dry sand that constituted all the surface of the earth where my friend had his habitation, so he was spared the damp discomfort of the poor outcast king.

I was sitting on that same sand, at the edge of a thick growth of mimosa, from which my lizard emerged as I looked. He had a plump, sleek body, some three inches long from the tip of his nose to the beginning of his tail, which graceful appendage extended a further three inches, making the fair total of half a foot at his full stretch. His bulk was well above the average lizards of the bush. He was a uniform chocolate brown, excepting his throat and belly, which were white, and the graceful white stripes which lined his sides from shoulders to flank. He had the bright, beady, glittering eyes of his kind. These were more repellent than pleasing. He came quite close to me, for I kept perfectly still, and he lay basking in the sun. It was yet early, and it was only pleasantly warm, an ideal spring day. I was surprised at his apparent friendliness. I slowly stretched forth my hand, but he edged off a little further away. It was a reasonable precaution. He had not the pleasure of my acquaintance. He was plainly not averse to an introduction, but his wishes were tempered with natural discretion.

After the lapse of a few minutes, a possible way out of the difficulty occurred to me. I looked and saw a fly perched on the sleeve of my coat. With a slap I had him in the hollow of my palm. Then again I gently extended my hand, holding the struggling fly by his feet, 'twixt my fingers. Cautiously I advanced the tempting bait to within eight inches of my companion. His wary glance suddenly took on a changed manner, and denoted a new interest. His whole body stiffened, and his attitude became keenly alert. His beady and repellent eyes fixed their concentrated stare upon the fly. Stealthily he crept up, with belly flattened on the sand. Step by step he crawled, to within a couple of inches, for a moment he poised, then leapt swiftly, seized his prey, swung off a trifling space, then briefly masticated and swallowed the dainty.

Highly pleased with the success of my experiment, I caught a few more flies, and sacrificed the victims in pursuit of my advantage. They were all snapped up and devoured with avidity. My friend was palpably more amenable to a closer relationship. I put forth my hand once more, and lightly touched his back with my finger tips. This was all that he would permit. To press further advances would have forced a renewal of guardedness on the part of a promising acquaintance, and would have been a retrograde step. Sufficient unto the day!

I was there the following morning. Soon my friend put in an appearance. Again I gave him a good breakfast. A mere touch of my fingers was, however, all that he would vouchsafe. He would not deliberately "shake hands." The intimacy was too brief to permit such a familiarity.

So matters went slowly on for another week. He was now always up to time, and twice I actually found him waiting! His coldness was surely diminishing. The frost of chilly aloofness was gone, and there was a distinct thawing. He was more than ever friendly, and I was allowed to stroke his back gently. But on no account would he let me handle him. Indeed, why should he? What did he know of me that he should put his life into my hands?

I had not dreamed of finding such a friend in the veld. An untamed lizard! Think of it! Is it not wonderful? I was delighted. It was a great experience, and I think it is worthy of the notch my memory provided for it more than two score years ago. As I grow old and look down the hill of life, I recall and view it with great pleasure.

But as evil comes and again takes its departure, so also do the good things arrive and likewise do not remain. What would you? Nature is all smiles and tears, and kindred to it is the natural life. "Pleasures are like poppies spread—you seize the flower, its bloom is shed!" Thus wrote the great Scotch poet. How true, but that it errs in its pessimism! Our greatest pleasures may be enjoyed for a while, according to their nature. Some are abbreviated by our own gluttony, that produces surfeit. However, the quotation nearly fits the sense of loss that came upon me when a period was put to my pleasant intercourse with Nebuchadnezzar.

It had lasted but a few days, and they seemed all too short. When next I called, he did not keep the appointment. I visited the spot again and again; but still he made no sign. Alas! I realized that my poor friend was no more! His kind have many enemies. Cats, snakes, skunks, secretary birds—all preyed upon them. Doubtless he had fallen an easy victim. His disposition was too confiding for his safety, and his experience of my friendship had but served to accentuate a deficiency of caution on his part.

Ah, well! It was after all much to have thus met and known him, even for that little while. It was a week of pleasurable interest and expectation, and it was a great thing in my life. I would not have missed it for a deal, and, if I could, I would not barter the experience for a very great deal. It was one of Nature's wonderful lessons, learned straight from the pages of her marvellous book!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE THREE BOUNDERS

THEY were captured alive, at the time of their discovery, away out on the open plains. Wandering vagrants they were, without visible means of subsistence. They had not been there nor anywhere else for more than a few days. They were but the infantile remnant of a band of rovers, who, when closely pursued by an armed posse, had been forced to fly for life and safety, and had unwillingly abandoned these three weakling members. You may be sure that the elders had not lightly parted from their offspring, for these gypsies of the veld loved their young and were loyal to them.

The stranded little ones were conveyed, under charge, to the homestead quarters, and confined in a stone-walled compartment. They were a puny, lean, hungry lot, and their slender bodies and long shanks accentuated their gaunt appearance. In this delicate stage of infancy they had to be nourished with the aid of the goat-ewes. These were caught and held fast while the hungry and thirsty ones sucked their requirements. They were soon reconciled to the new conditions. As their behaviour appeared to warrant this step, they were allowed out of their prison during the daylight hours, and were permitted, under surveillance, to wander about the homestead grounds. They kept within bounds, and did not attempt to break away to the scenes of their former vagabond life. The vigilance of a regular guard was therefore relaxed.

They justified the measure of confidence. They were on hand for their evening feed, and submissively returned to their quarters for the night. Their cheerfulness was remarkable, and their exuberant spirits were manifested in active form. They raced and jumped, and their legs became so strong that they performed the most amazing leaps. They excelled in this sport, and established easy records. Their long, slender, strong and sinewy limbs were designed to accomplish these prodigious springs, and the instinct to practise them was implanted in them from the beginning. They were also the swiftest of runners. So fleet and nimble did they become that they could outstrip or outleap any human, white or black, or any horse, dog, or other animal on the farm.

And yet they took no advantage. They could have run for freedom, and been beyond recovery in a few minutes. They liked their life, for they were kindly treated, and they were "true to their salt." Their milk diet had long since been discontinued. They did not like that! but their buoyant spirits soon enabled them to forget the deprivation. They were now strict vegetarians, dependent for sustenance on the herbs and bushes of the veld. They extended the range of their movements to a radius of a mile and a half beyond the homestead. They had the more commodious quarters of the large kraal, or even camped in the open, as they wished. Their captivity was entirely nominal, for they were free to go, and were merely held in the willing bonds of domesticity to which they had become agreeably used. The goats, with whom they came into daily contact, remained their near friends.

Their habiliments were identically similar. They had long, vandyke brown coats, extending to the thighs, with broad, reddish-brown chocolate facings running in an even band from shoulder to groin. White vests covered their throats and bellies. Their pantaloons matched the coats, but had a white lining on the inner side to harmonize with the sleeves of their coats, which were also white on the inner side. The covering of their faces was white, but for the remarkable bands that matched the coat facings, and ran in a boomerang curve from the top of the head to the edge of the upper eyelid, continuing from the middle of the lower eyelid to betwixt the nostril and the upper lip. The chocolate bands on their sides showed up in bold contrast between the lighter brown and the white, and were conspicuous at a range of a few hundred yards. Additionally they each wore a pair of horns in successful emulation of the humble goats, for they were gracefully curved, perfect in symmetry, and proportionate in size.

But the splendour of their outfit was the glorious snow-white ruffle that they wore on their backs, from the middle of which it stretched to the end of the coat-tails, and lay concealed between and under them. This ruffle they opened out, brushing aside the coat-tails in the act, and displayed to its fullest expanse and advantage when they executed those tremendous bounds. Then, streaming out, and spreading wide, appeared the magnificent, spotless, white ruffle, hiding the sober brown of the coat, and covering the wearers in a great and wonderful glory.

But all the things of earth come to an end, and with all their marvellous attainments as swift runners, and notwithstanding their buoyancy and mighty springing powers, yet did it avail them nothing, for they could not outstrip the relentless fate that pursues and overtakes the fleetest. First one, then another was surprised by some treacherous, stranger dog. The last took alarm and fled into the great wild, and was neither seen nor heard of more.

Such were the experiences that came to us, and such the happenings attendant on our possession of these three noble members of the true South African gazelle species. It is the most beautiful of all gazelles, the nimblest and most graceful of the "bounders," the elegant and perfect-limbed springbok. For he is the living glory of the limitless, sun-baked Karroo, endowing its dead and arid plains with life and motion, and tempting the hunter with gun, with cart and harnessed horse, or saddled mount and rifle slung over shoulder, to the most exciting, exhilarating and healthful sport in the annals of the chase. Then hurrah! for the springbok, the leaping, springing, bounding buck, prince of the fleet-limbed, king of the swift and nimble-footed, superb, splendid, grand, glorious!

CHAPTER XXIV

RIETBOK

HE was but the ordinary, common sort, with no appearance to speak of, and no qualities to brag about. He was just a horse. He was a whitish, speckled grey, what the Boers termed a "wit schimmel"—a *white grey.*

He was the quietest, most docile and most inoffensive animal on the farm. The hasty and thoughtless were inclined to judge him a fraud, which was unjust, for he was perfectly genuine. We had plenty of work out of him in the long course of his career, and his service was faithful, good and true. He gave his money's worth, and a deal more.

Why they called him "Rietbok"—*Reed buck*—I do not know. It must have been a mere fancy, and it sounded smart and pleasant to the namer. You could coax him into a trot, or urge him into a canter, but he preferred a walk. It was slow and sure, and it was not hard work. Yet he was absolutely and thoroughly reliable. He had no vice and no humours. He never shied and he never shirked, nor did he ever sulk. He was safe to start and sure to arrive; but he was never in a hurry. His practice appeared to be guided by the old motto: "More haste, less speed!"

He was the chosen mount of all the new-comers. One after another had him. They could not well fall off. If they did, it was because they were not safe outside of an arm-chair. They must have either fallen asleep to the lullaby of Rietbok's ambling, or, as riders, they were utterly hopeless! So he passed on as an heirloom down a long line of successive learners.

The years rolled by, and still old Rietbok was the trusty bearer of all who would take no risks, or did not wish to rob the insurance societies. His beat lay mainly between the homestead and the out-stations, and he was sometimes reserved for the use of an overseer, or other white hand located at one of these places. If you heard that some one was coming over on Rietbok, and could make sure that he had started—for the news might easily have travelled in advance—you could confidently lay fifty to one that the old horse would safely deliver his charge. There was no uncertainty about it so far as Rietbok was concerned anyway. His pace was possible of acceleration, and it was sometimes remarkably quickened when he happened to carry a live rider with progressive ideas; but it was steady and constant. He never came to a standstill. His destined arrival was sure as death, rent, the income tax, or the next strike

Faithfully for twenty-six long years did he serve and conscientiously fulfil his duties. He retired on a full and well-earned pension. He was turned out to graze on the best of the veld for the remainder of his days. He was showing the signs of wear and tear. His teeth were no more so good as they had been, and he was growing lean, for he was growing old. He had indeed earned the leisure of his declining years.

He had scarce entered on his retirement, having gone to live near his favourite outstation, and joined the company of some of his quieter friends, when the startling announcement came—" HORSE THIEVES ! " There had been a swoop and a scoop, and half a dozen animals, old Rietbok among the number, had been taken. With all speed the remaining horses were rounded up, and three of the best mounts were picked out. Three armed and bold riders were quickly in the saddle, and on the track.

But the thieves had got twelve hours' start. Yet, on the third day, the fugitives were overtaken—thanks again to old Rietbok—and the stolen animals were recovered. Our poor old horse had been ridden to a standstill ; but he had retarded the flight of the rapscallion gang. These succeeded in making good their escape, and saved their unworthy carcases, but they had abandoned their mounts. Once more had our grand old horse rendered yeoman service in the evening of his life. He was brought back leisurely ; but the adventure had done him no good. It was a cruel business, and for that alone the getting away of those rogues was regrettable. I have no doubt that they met with their deserts later. " Give them plenty of rope——" is the saying, and you may take it that the rascally horse thieves paid the unwelcome but well-deserved penalty in the end.

Rietbok went back to his favourite grounds and rejoined the company of his friends. He got over the effects of his last great effort, though, no doubt, it took something off his life. But his vitality was wonderful. He had persistently gone slow in his younger days, and had not burnt up his energy. He had stored a surprising amount of latent force, and he was well preserved for an "old one." He was with us for four more years, when, on a certain day, he came home and entered his accustomed kraal. There did not seem to be anything the matter. He just looked tired. Next morning he lay in his last long sleep. There was no sign of a struggle. The poor old boy had come home to die in peace. The sound, stolid, sturdy old warrior, with a useful and a blameless record; right well and worthily had he played his part, and with quiet dignity faced the end, an example for man and beast—Rietbok the good and the reliable!

CHAPTER XXV

VULTURES

Part I

THE common South African Vulture is a large ungainly bird the size of a big turkey. He looks his best when soaring aloft on full-spread pinions. Swiftly and gracefully he sweeps through the boundless space, attaining an altitude that often carries him beyond range of the human eye. At such a time he may be mistaken for the lordly eagle; but the latter would not be flattered, for his inferior, though also a dweller in high places, is a mere filthy scavenger, and a devourer of carrion. He eats the larger dead animals that lie about, no matter what they are, or how they die.

If the unfortunate victim lies stretched in the sickness of death, the vultures wait near by for him to expire, and they are on him almost before the breath has left his body. First of all they gouge out the eyes with their terrible beaks, and great is the scramble for these choice morsels! If an animal succumbs unexpectedly from sickness, from being struck by a bullet, or other mischance, these birds, invisible till now, appear out of the blue vault in ones and twos. They are gifted with marvellous telescopic sight. It is certainly not, as has been stated, the sense of smell that guides them. When *one* makes for the point of discovery, others see him and follow, and the signal passes on through space till all the soaring company are amove for the common angle that indicates the place of meeting, and marks the grisly feasting ground. It only requires, therefore, that *one* should see the object of interest, and thus the question of how they can tell does not appear so impossible, though it is still wonderful. It is indeed a gruesome sight when they tear and rip at the poor carcase. Note one hopping clumsily away with a ragged piece of flesh, and others following and disputing possession, each grabbing what he can (unless you have a strong stomach do not read on. I am telling of the vultures and their ways !). They rend and devour with might and main, as if their very lives depend on it. They scramble with appalling eagerness, and make devilish haste over the ghastly meal, till all the substance is cleared from the bony framework, within and without, and only the poor white skeleton remains.

Then they sit around and rest, and if the carcase be that of a large animal, such as an ox or a horse, many of them are gorged to repletion, and unable to fly. They have to await the process of digestion, and often stay on the spot till the following day. But if at such a time you rush upon them, then, with hideous convulsions, they pump up the semiliquid surplusage of the revolting cargo from its bulging, cavernous hold, and vomit it forth, hopping and running along with outspread wings in the act, so as to gain the required impetus to enable them to rise from the ground and assume their flight. And the foul stream even pours from their throats as they mount and bear heavily away on those mighty pinions! Horrible? Yes! disgusting, and gruesomely horrible, yet in no wise overdrawn. It is an exact statement of the naked facts.

And, as is the feast, so is the bird—repulsive to the last degree. He carries and exhales the strong, evil odour of the carrion. His body is covered with lice, that show like grey-blue ashes among the sparse neck feathers and on his ugly bald pate. The smell of his newlaid eggs when being blown is a fearful stench, that would make the squeamish ill.

Yet is the vulture a most necessary and useful bird. As a scavenger he covers the vast, wide veld in his operations, stripping the flesh off the carcases that would otherwise rot, and poison the air, the earth and the water.

Nature has fittingly modelled him for his duties. He has a small, longish, narrow head, a corresponding beak that terminates in a strong, down-curved tip; he has a long thin neck between his hunched shoulders, and he is lean-shanked. Thus he is enabled to thrust between the ribs, and to reach through the interstices into the interior, and he can also scoop out the sockets of the eyes, and the hollows of the bones. He is constructed on different lines from the eagle, for he has other employment:

he has the menial, dirty and degrading work to do.

Have you ever happened on a dead vulture? If so, you have indeed been fortunate (?), for it is even rarer than the proverbial dead monkey. Of the latter, the railway now accounts for quite a large number! But I can tell you where you may find the remains of many hundreds of dead vultures, though the way is difficult and the going hard, as I will tell you.

We were discussing this very question of when, where and how these birds died, for it was granted that they could not live for ever. It was at our old homestead, near to which the vultures have an extensive "breeding-ground," on the ledges of the great mountain precipice. No one was able to answer the riddle; but I ventured the theory that when the bird felt that all was not well with him, he made tracks for his breeding-place, it being likewise his roosting-spot; that, if his sickness were unto death, he perished on the rocky ledge, and was generally precipitated to the base of the precipice. On being challenged, I had to admit that I had not been there to see, and so could not speak of knowledge. At this point, a young Dutchman, who had come from Cape Town to acquire a knowledge of farming, and incidentally to learn a little English, made an astounding announcement. He said in effect: "My tutor was a Professor of the Cape University, and he was a very clever man. He told us that, when a vulture became sick and felt that its time had come, it flew upwards, circling ever higher and higher, till it reached an altitude beyond the influence of the earth's attraction, and died in space." This sounded tremendous; but it was not convincing; it was, on the contrary, palpably ridiculous and utterly absurd. It was scandalous! and we did not hesitate to tell the Dutchman what we thought of it. He was a bit upset, but we could not help that. We were not having a "coach and four" driven through the Almighty laws of gravitation, as it were, and its eternal decrees set at defiance, by a mere, degraded, scavenging bird; no, not for a dozen Cape Professors!

A few days later time presented the opportunity, and I determined to put my theory to the test. I made a bee-line for the base of the precipice, immediately below the breeding-place, which loomed large and white against the face of the rocks, and could be seen at a distance of thirty miles. The short-cut was exceedingly difficult. Nearing the spot, I had to clamber over extensive piles of huge loose rocks. Beyond these, long, rank, tough and slippery grass covered the stones, so that there was not sure footing; then came a belt of trees and high shrubs, a variety of the latter shedding a white powder from its leaves when disturbed which was injurious to the eyes, and these had to be shielded, as the powder made them smart. And now, after three hours' hard going, I burst upon a scene. There they lay, those dead vultures, in scores, in hundreds! In all stages of decay, along and near the foot of the great rock they rested. In some spots their mouldering bones and rotting feathers were accumulated to a depth of a foot and a half. There arose from the gruesome relics a disagreeable and far-reaching stench. I did not stay long! I had a good, hard look, and made speed down the difficult declivity. I was soon out of range of the deadly odour of that great bird-mortuary. I had established my theory!

PART II

VULTURES' EGGS

AND now for the eggs! Not that I, or *anyone*, would wish to *eat* them. A starving man would not attempt it twice. As for the smell, you would cross the road to avoid a second whiff! Nevertheless, the most hideous things, though filled with awfulness, are likewise often full of interest. I will therefore tell you of an expedition that was organized at our farm for the purpose of getting these eggs. It was fifty years ago.

George Holding, of whom I have written, my cousin who was with us learning farming, our second tutor, already mentioned, my two elder brothers—lads of ten-and-a-half and twelve years, with a Hottentot boy as a help, formed the party. The equipment consisted of a hundred yards of one-inch manilla rope, two knapsacks containing three days' provisions, a few utensils, such as a kettle, a gridiron, two or three pannikins, and as many cups. A few blankets were also taken, for it was the spring-time, and the nights were cold on the mountain-top.

A start was made in the morning after breakfast. They journeyed on foot, each carrying part of the outfit, but the boy bringing the bulk. They made for the left and nearer end of the mountain. It was easier going, and the face of the great precipice was circumvented that way. Counting the deviations, and the climb of 3,000 feet, the distance to be traversed from the homestead to the summit above the breeding-place was six miles.

At the fountain, on the nearer mountain-side, they took in water. For this purpose they had a flat barrel of two gallon capacity. It was well on in the afternoon when they reached their destination. They took their bearings for the next day's operations, and made their camping arrangements as comfortable as the means admitted. They had meat, both raw and cooked, bread, and butter of goats' milk, so it was only necessary to prepare coffee. There was brushwood; but it was not plentiful, for the mountain-top was bleak and windswept. Anyway, the boy gathered sufficient, and made a good fire on the leeside of some large boulders. They ate their supper, and sat by the warmth for an hour or two. Then they disposed their blankets, took off their coats and their boots, and turned in for the night.

You may be sure they did not lie late the next morning. It was chilly on that mountain-top, before the sun was well up. At daylight the boy started the comfortable fire, and at sunrise coffee was ready. They were soon around to warm the exterior at the pleasant blaze, and to heat the interior with the cheering cup, that puts new life into a man, but does not inebriate.

The rope was now uncoiled and passed over the edge of the cliff, at a spot that had been fixed upon the previous day. At this point, the face was not quite perpendicular, but bulged slightly outward. The rope was let down as far as the nearest ledge, where the eggs could be seen, and was so adjusted that it touched or hung close against the cliff all the way down. The upper end was looped and securely tied to a large boulder, or rock, on the summit. With knapsack slung over his shoulders, my cousin grasped the rope and passed over the side. Hand over hand he descended, with bare feet treading against the rocks, until he landed on the ledge. Then he unslung his knapsack, reached for the eggs he could get at, and packed them carefully in the sack.

The proceeding was tedious, and the strain was great, for the distance was considerable, and the venturer had to be careful as well as bold. I have said that the rope was a hundred yards long, for the precipice was 600 feet high, and the breeding-ledges were variously located from about 150 feet to 300 feet, or half-way down. You can imagine, therefore, that in the case of such an arduous and dangerous journey, an average distance of 225 feet down and 225 feet up, a man would hardly undertake the trip more than once in a day.

I may say that my cousin was keen-eyed, had a cool head, and was an excellent climber.

After him, Holding, who had been a sailor, and was likewise a good climber, ventured over, to assist in drawing up the eggs, and to hold the rope in position, and so help my cousin to come up again; and thus, ascending a matter of about sixty feet at a time, they steadily worked their way back to the summit, and eventually made a safe landing with the eggs.

And thus they proceeded, turn and turn about. At most they did not make more than two descents in any one day, and they gathered an average of about ten eggs each trip. For a vulture lays but two eggs for one hatching, and though you might look down and see many broody spots on a ledge, apparently close together, you would find them surprisingly far apart if you went there, and you might also find all but a few places inaccessible from your landing-place. The ledges that appeared to be on one level and easy going, would, on closer acquaintance, prove to be irregular, or broken up, so that it might be dangerous, or even impossible to pass from one part to another.

Twice, during their stay on the mountain, the boy was sent to the homestead with a note to my father to report progress, and to fetch any requisites. The letters were indited by our tutor, a B.A. of Oxford, and a remarkably good speller as well. Yet in each missive he spelt *rope*, r-o-a-p! He was quite unconscious of it, and was greatly astonished when my father pointed out the mistake to him later. However, the man who makes no mistakes does nothing at all, for he cannot otherwise avoid them. It was a take-down, though, for our tutor, and he had to submit to the inevitable chaff for long afterwards.

They were on that mountain for four nights and three whole days. On the fifth day they had collected some thirty odd eggs, which the tutor bored with the small egg-drill, expelling the contents with the blowpipe. The empty shells were then carefully stowed in the knapsacks, the traps were packed, the bundles tied, and the rope was coiled up. The party started homewards, and arrived all safe and well on the evening of the fifth day, counting from the time of their going. Thus ended one of the strangest and most singular expeditions ever undertaken in the Karroo.

I may add that this was really my cousin's third venture down the great precipice. On the first occasion he only found young vultures. The season was already too advanced. The second time he got no more than three eggs. It was yet too early in the spring!

What Became of the Eggs.

Vultures' eggs! Risk their lives for such things! What did they want them for?

As for risks, there is no accounting for what men will do, and the causes in which they will adventure. And it is good that there are such men. What we owe to them, is not to be counted in money. What the world owes to them, it will never repay. The expedition was conceived by our tutor, who wanted the eggs. The men, who went over the side of the precipice, had nothing to gain. My father sent them because they were willing to go. It was none of their duty. Had they objected, it would have been left at that. But the adventure appealed to them. It was something new in the monotonous life of the farm.

As for the eggs, we sent some of them to the curator of the Cape Town Museum, as we had previously sent hundreds of other eggs. He retained some specimens, and sent the remainder to museums in England, America, Belgium and elsewhere. From there again, spare specimens of other birds' eggs were sent out to him. He passed on a few rare ones that he did not require to us. Thus we obtained eggs of the Albatross, the "King Penguin," and the Eider-duck, besides others, which we added to our own extensive collection. The greater number of the vultures' eggs were given to our tutor. He left for England shortly afterwards, and sold some of them, at five pounds each, to collectors, and so did very well.

I have not described the eggs. They were somewhat larger than turkeys' eggs, and their colour was a dirty white. They were dull and uninteresting-looking things. Unlike the birds that laid them, they had a price ; but like them, they were neither beautiful nor fragrant !

Horrible is the bird, his food revolting, and his product disgusting. But he has well-nigh disappeared from the Karroo, doubtless through the careless poisoning of carcasses to kill the jackals ; and who can tell the price we have paid as the result of his destruction !

CHAPTER XXVI

THE EAGLE

A VERY different bird from the ignominious vulture, is the lordly Eagle, the bird of majestic mien. His large and kingly head, on the broad, strong neck, sits superbly on his sturdy, shapely shoulders. Note his ample breast, his massive, sinewy thighs, and his mighty talons. Behold the large, piercing, and magnificent eyes, dark and fathomless, how they look afar from beneath those strong and clear-cut brows. See that wide and terrible beak, round-curved, like the lion's claw, sharp pointed and fearful. He sits upon his lonely crag, and silently contemplates the world below. He spreads his mighty pinions, eight feet across, he rises easily, and lightly as the thistle-down he floats away, and sails evenly and gracefully into the boundless space, like a goodly barque upon the smooth waters. As his shadow falls upon the earth beneath, the denizens crouch and tremble in their fear. When he utters his terrible cry, the fowls of the air and the lesser beasts of the plains betake themselves to flight, and hide away in affright. For a mighty monarch, and the King of birds, is he. He also rules the lesser beasts, and they shrink beneath his yoke. He sits in high places, and his throne is on high. It is established on an everlasting foundation of rock, hewn out by Mighty Nature's hand, on the face of the great lonely cliff, where neither man nor beast may enter. There also is his eyrie, and his lordly palace, and there also reigns his stately, consort queen, they two, and they alone!

None dispute his sway. He is a king, and he eats the king's meat. He sees that the larder is low, and that it needs replenishment. He launches himself into the great void upon his strong and magnificent wings. He soars away and on high, above the valleys and over the plains. He sees the creatures of earth below, as they cower and hide; but he passes on, silent and unheeding. He wants nothing that is common or unclean. Game that is fitting for the royal feast, and meat that will grace the King's table, is his quest.

His eagle eyes flash, they light upon a young buck, well conditioned, and of goodly proportions. He stays the onrush of his flight, he hovers near, he pauses, then gracefully he poises. For a moment he appears as a motionless speck in the vast heavens. THEN HE SWOOPS! And now, indeed, behold a superb, a splendid, and stupendous spectacle—a great, a grand, and glorious sight—a vision for gods and men! Like a ball from the mouth of the cannon he comes. From a thousand feet on high, and two thousand feet away, he falls like the lightning, with wings half folded, and the whole weight of his strong body behind. From a long thousand yards comes the sound of that mighty rush, as he cleaves the air with his descending bulk, for he speeds at two hundred miles an hour. For a few, brief seconds, you see a swiftly scudding streak, you hear the hissing noise as he hurtles from on high—and he *has* his prey. He bears it aloft, and flies heavily, but purposefully back to the seat of his domain. An instant's faltering in his downward plunge, an error of inches in his irresistible descent, and he would be dashed to pieces by the impact of his swift, heavy body, with the hard floor of earth below; but the fearless, feathered huntsman neither fails nor falters, and the steadfast and sure-eyed eagle makes no such mistake!

He returns to his palace, he enters, he lays down the royal game of his own killing, he sits upon his throne. His stately consort comes, he regards her graciously, he extends the sceptre of his grace, she sits beside him, and they dine in regal state.

Such is the lordly Eagle, Monarch of the rocks, and King of the mountain fastnesses. His presence is magnificent and full of majesty. His flashing eye denotes the will that commands and prevails. His glance never falters, nor is there that which will make it quail. From the crown of his shapely and kingly head, to the tips of his strong iron talons, his bearing is royal and stately. His every movement, to the turn of his fine great head, bespeaks dignity. None but Death shall cast him down or remove him from his place!

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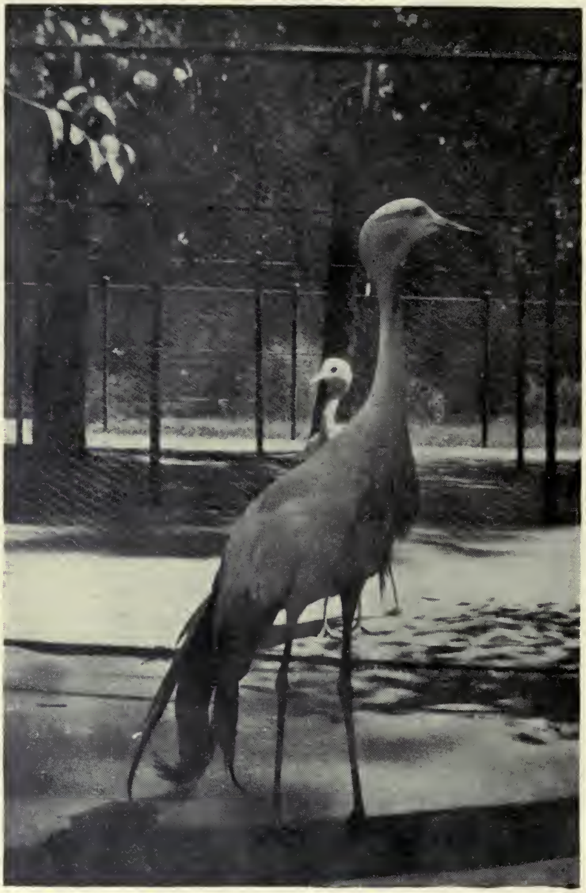

The Two Stanleys.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TWO STANLEYS

NUMBER ONE was just four weeks old when he was enrolled in the ranks of the homestead pets. Number two joined up a fortnight later. He was not so large as number one, though he was of the same age. He had not been so well nourished. The long foot journeys had told on him. His parents had been compelled, through disturbance and stress of circumstances, to shift their ground repeatedly. But *they* had their wings to assist them, as well as their strong legs.

At the first they were afraid of one another, and kept as far apart as the bounds of their enclosure permitted. In their loneliness, however, they gradually drew closer together. After a few days they lay down side by side on the grass, and dozed in the warmth of the noonday sun. In the ordinary course, one began to stir from his slumbers and woke up the other. Then, in a moment of startled forgetfulness, they jumped to their feet, and regarded each other with open-beaked astonishment, and fearful hissings. Seized with panic, they rushed apart, and again put the greatest possible distance between themselves. Recurrent reapproachments and ensuing separations followed, till they got used to each other. They gradually forgot their fears, and confidence was at last established.

A quaint and ungainly pair they were, with their large heads, long beaks and necks, small, soft, round bodies, fluffy and greyish, long, lean legs, and splaying feet and toes. They fed on bread-crumbs, wheat, small mealies, and various grain, a variety of seeds, meat; worms, and flies.

They thrived well, and grew fast. Soon, there was hardly any difference between their respective sizes. At the age of six months, they had donned their garb of blue, and their dark wing feathers were well developed. These graceful dark pinions grew long and flowing, till at eight months they swept the ground as they walked erect. An elegant ruffle of wavy feathers covered their rounded breasts, and their appearance was dignified and stately. They had short, square-cut tails ; but the feathers of their fine wings folded over these, and completely hid them from view, excepting when in flight. Any one, who did not know better, mistook the flowing pinions for long sweeping tails. The deception was wondrously natural.

For many months they had roamed over the homestead grounds, and they now began to extend their wanderings away into the veld. But they still turned up of an evening when the poultry were fed, and a little extra grain was thrown for their benefit. The amount of food they could stow away was amazing. Once, when mealies were abundant, I tried to give them as much as they would eat. They kept at it till their crops were full. They went on, and piled up the food inside their long necks. They continued till the mealies stood up to their very heads, and still they ate! They persevered, their crops yet expanding, and their necks swelling the while. I grew alarmed, and surrendered the contest. Not alone was the grain being used up, but I was afraid that I should commit bird-slaughter! On the third day after, their crops yet held a lot of those mealies, awaiting the turn of digestion. It was surprising. It was incredible!

It appears as though these birds have the capacity to take in plenty when it is available, against the lean days that may follow. Thus the camel takes in store of water for the desert journey. But the camel has several compartments to his stomach, and the birds have but one crop each. However, it is an accommodating and prodigious crop, and it is ably seconded by the long neck, of expansive power, that surmounts it. No more of those experiments for me, with mealies at the current price!

They now made use of their wings, and it was fine to see them flying, with their long necks extended horizontally, and straight ahead, in perfect line with the body, and the short bob-tail, their lean, long legs, continuing in an even stretch behind, and the lengthy, graceful wings, plying at right angles—the whole figure presenting a symmetrical cross, propelled through space by the moving transverse arms. And it was good to hear their rousing, ringing cry—"kar-r-r, koor-r-r!" as they hailed each other, while they sped easily on their aerial way. I have witnessed these birds in migratory flight, spread in an unbroken line across the heavens, from horizon to horizon!

Our two Stanleys sometimes accompanied us far into the veld, and even up the mountain side. If they could not make the pace by walking, they adjusted arrears from time to time, by flying over the intervening distances. But they closed up, and kept by us, if an eagle hovered near, for of such they were afraid. They waded up to their bellies in the dams and the river-pools, where they caught frogs and devoured water insects. Thus, they scored over their friends, the farmyard fowls, both in the cool and pleasant exercise, and in the extended fare.

We possessed our Stanley-cranes for nearly two years. They gradually wandered farther afield, and remained longer away. They flew to distant places, and returned after an absence of many days. We saw them less and still less frequently, till, after a while, they did not come back any more. They may have joined up with others of their company, for their kind were common. I like to think that; but they were subjected to grave risk at the hands of the inhuman, because they were so tame. They were fine birds, and graced the homsetead with their stately presence. Their departure left a decided blank, and we missed our two Stanleys when they returned to us no more.

CHAPTER XXVIII

STOMPIE

HE was nearly two months old when we got him. He looked the least bit like a little turkey; but he had a rounder body, his brownish to yellowish legs were shorter, and so was his neck, on which rested his little broad, flat head, with its short, rounded beak. His coat and nether garments were of a uniform drab; but somewhat lighter on the under-sides. There was nothing at all remarkable or interesting about his appearance. He had a good pair of eyes, though you could hardly have termed them brilliant. He belonged to the tribe of bustards and was what the Dutchmen call a "Paauw" (Anglicized—"pow").

A gentle, docile pet he was, as he trotted up with his monotonous "choup-choup" when he was called.

There are usually two of them in a brood, but I do not know what became of his companion. The shepherd found only him. Yet the other might have been a few feet away. They are exceedingly difficult to see, especially when the veld is a bit dry, and is clad in its brown garb. At a sound by the parent bird, they will throw themselves flat upon the ground, with the neck stretched out in front, and lie perfectly quiet, until they are called back, and know that the danger is past. At such a time, even if you thought that you had marked the spot where they lay, you might walk to and fro for an hour and not find them. You might even tread on them before you saw them. I suppose it was for these reasons that he was the only pet of his kind that we ever secured.

When he was four months of age, I saw him try to fight one of the Stanley-cranes. They had quarrelled over some crumbs. He stood on tip-toe, reaching upward, and jumped to get at his long-shanked enemy. But he was too diminutive. The tall crane towered over him, and gave him a dig in the back with his big long beak, whereat poor Stompie retired from the unequal contest, and ran for safety, wisely abandoning the few crumbs to his long and formidable antagonist. For food he had mostly anything that was fed to the fowls, though at first it was given to him in smaller fragments. He also ate houseflies, and other small insects, including worms and caterpillars, but not the ranker and grosser sorts. He likewise fed on the leaves of various sheep-bushes.

In another two months, his wings had developed sufficiently to bear him up. He began to fly about the homestead grounds, and did mostly for himself in the veld hard by. He did not venture far, for the season was good, and there was abundance at hand. I could always find him quickly when I wished. But one evening I did not see him. I did not look long before I discovered him lying on the ground, at his favourite feeding-spot. He was yet alive, and to my call, responded with a faint and mournful "choup-choup!" He had been mauled by a miserable vagrant dog. It was marvellous that he had not been killed outright. His legs were cruelly bitten, and were stretched out stiff and stark. They were so rigid that they could not be folded at all. I could see no marks on his body otherwise, and his wings were sound. I made him as comfortable as possible in a candle box, with rags and other soft material around and under his sorely wounded legs. He was very patient in his suffering, and fed a little from my hand; but his hurt was too grievous, and he only survived for four days longer.

Poor Stompie! he could easily have flown away; but he was used to dogs, and did not know that any of them would harm him. He was not yet eight months, still small and frail, and little more than half-grown. His kind live for twenty years; but he was cut off in less than twice as many weeks. A mere tender youth, he had scarce begun to live!

CHAPTER XXIX

DROUGHT AND EROSION

MUCH has been said and written about the feasibility of increasing the rainfall, and the possibility of doing away with the droughts. We have been told, that tree-planting is the agency best calculated to bring about this ideal condition of the climate. Meanwhile the country is drying up, so it has often been said, because it rains much less than it used to do.

All these things are wrong. The rainfall never can and never will be increased, nor is it necessary, or even desirable, that it should be. On the other hand the droughts are a necessity, and the idea of their being stopped, or even checked, by human intervention is ridiculous. In support of the tree-planting theory, it is stated that much rain falls in areas where there are many trees. It does not occur to these theorists that the rains came first, and that the trees followed because the soil was also suitable. There are also places where it rains much, but where there are no trees. By all means plant trees where and when it is practicable. But in the greater part of the Karroo it is quite impracticable. What *can* be done effectively, is to preserve the indigenous trees, and encourage their growth. Not that it will influence the rains, for these are born in the ocean.

It is true that the country has long been drying up, because of the continuous erosion ; but it neither rains less nor more than it used to do. At our old homestead, in the heart of the Karroo, a gauge has been kept for sixty years, and the average rainfall (reckoned over ten-year periods) recorded throughout that time, has been a trifle in excess of eight inches a year. A spell of drought has always been followed by exceptional rains. Arrears have been made up, and the law of averages has prevailed. Before the effects of erosion had become serious, when the veld grew closer, and the fountains had not dried up, the scanty rainfall sufficed to a great extent. The water spread over the earth and soaked into the ground. The springs were replenished and strengthened. The sun's rays did not search out the bare places, as in these days, and scorch the roots of the vegetation, and when the rains held off, the veld did not dry up so quickly. The fountains were naturally more numerous, and stronger, and they resisted the droughts longer. Now, the veld is sparser, and it cannot hold back the water, which escapes by the innumerable channels.

The Karroo is healthy *because* it is dry. If it ceased to be dry, it would not be so healthy. There are few stock diseases, and they are not virulent. It would be different if it rained more, and regularly. On the plains, the mineral salts would rise to the surface, and the soil would be corrupted and destroyed. The character of the veld generally would become changed. Much poisonous growth would spring up and flourish, and the country would be invaded by hosts of caterpillars and myriads of other insects. The droughts give the soil necessary rest, and preserve its strength. They check and destroy the noxious plants, and kill off the countless worms and their companion pests, which would otherwise overwhelm and devour the land.

But though the droughts may not be obviated, they may be grappled with, and their effects minimized. "Trekking" should cease. The large farms should be subdivided into series of camps, by fencing, each camp, if possible, having its own well or dam of water, and the running about of the animals and the trampling of the veld must be stopped. It would probably be better to cart water to a flock, than to drive it three or four miles forwards and backwards, thus destroying the bushes, trampling the earth loose, and reducing the sheep to leanness. The latter should have more rest, and the chief cause of erosion should be removed.

Our farms are really too large. So long as one man holds ground that should be occupied by ten, and while it is deemed necessary that he must have 10,000 sheep, when, if things were regulated accordingly, he should prosper with 1,000, progress will be retarded. In Australia and New Zealand they also have their droughts. There, a farmer used to run 50,000 or even 100,000 sheep, and a place with 10,000 only was considered of no account. Now, in the settled parts, people do well with 500 head. They are twice the weight, and treble the value of the former-day sheep. The fleeces are double the size, the quality is better, and they fetch four times the money. I speak of *normal* times. The same ground fetches as many pounds sterling per acre as it used to be valued at in shillings.

We shall have to follow to the greater extent on the same lines. A man may give better attention to 500 sheep than 10,000, and will not require to be rich before he can buy them. He can grow lucerne or other fodder during rainy seasons, and stack it in readiness for the dry years. With 1,000 or 2,000 acres to supervise, he can block the channels, so as to turn the water back on the veld. By means of a spade he can throw up little embankments, and check it from flowing away too quickly. The process is simple on the plains, over a reasonable area. Thus the rain will soak into the soil, the veld will again grow more closely, the springs will be strengthened, and the old order of nature will be restored. There will be many homesteads and orchards, more wells, and more water, and larger cultivated lands.

The men with big farms and huge flocks, with gigantic capital involved and heavy accompanying liabilities, struggle all their lives. They repeatedly start more or less anew, after serious and inevitable drought losses, that are gravely aggravated by their unwieldy positions. Yet some will say, that if their farms were still larger, or if they had more farms, they could cope more easily with their difficulties. This may be; but how can they add to their acres without further capital. And how can they, in reason, hold unlimited ground, when the world is waiting to divide with them? They will not agree with me, and none may do so. But I am sure as I write, that, not only the future, but the salvation of the Karroo, and all South Africa, will lie in the direction that I have taken the pains to indicate. The dreadful and continuous erosion must be stayed, and the cause of it removed. There is no other way, and it will surely come. The world moves quickly; but our old dear land yet goes slowly, and it will take time. But it will come!

How can one man, with a piece of ground as large as a fair-sized English county, stop the water from running away. He has neither the time nor the money, nor yet the necessary labour. Why does not Government do it? There is also not the labour, and in any case there are too few to share the cost. But with ten to twenty times as many occupiers, and more hands coming in their train to seek for work, it becomes another matter. Each will find time, money, and labour to reclaim his own little farm, and double, treble, and quadruple its value. Thus may we look forward to the redemption of our land, and hope for its ultimate salvation.

CHAPTER XXX

THE DESTRUCTION AND PRESERVATION OF ANIMALS

PART I

UNTIL lately the destructive secretary bird was specially protected by our laws. In the Transvaal this protection has ceased; but in the Cape he is still immune. Till now many useful animals and birds, which include the list of his victims, have had no such protection. Why? Is it the result of ignorance or indifference? Is the subject not worthy the attention of our agricultural societies? The dearth of knowledge concerning the things of nature is appalling. I have just read a leading article, in an influential local paper, about our neglect to destroy the jackal, the baboon, and the *house-sparrow!*

We know that jackals and baboons are classed as vermin, that their destruction is rewarded, and that it proceeds apace. The crusade against the jackal has lasted for generations, and it is only his extraordinary cunning that has saved him from extermination. He kills a few mice and he has a beautiful skin, otherwise he is no use whatever.

On the other hand he takes toll yearly of many lambs, and of course we destroy him. But it is not easy. Set a trap as cleverly as conceivable and you will seldom take him.

The practical method is poisoning. Many are destroyed in this way; but more escape. They pick up the piece of poisoned meat and swallow it. As soon as they begin to feel bad, they throw it up again. They often carry the bait for a distance and then drop it. They suspect that all is not well. Sometimes they will not touch it at all. They seem to know that there is something wrong. But when they eat the poison near water, and take a drink afterwards—*that* settles them!

Why not shoot them? Because though there may be scores around, you seldom see one. They prowl about mostly at night, and then you only hear their unearthly cries. During the day they hide in remote rocky holes, from which it is hard to dislodge them. They are the incarnation of cunning. All efforts to deal with them, otherwise than by poisoning, have proved futile, comparatively, and are a waste of time and energy.

Of what use is the ungainly baboon? If it cannot be termed cheerful, it is at least enlivening to hear his rousing shout, as it echoes through the mountains. With his hands he turns over large stones, killing and devouring the scorpions, spiders, and other insects, that lie concealed beneath. We must bear in mind that he is the only animal specially equipped to do this service. Remove him from the scene, and the numbers of these things may become a burdensome scourge. The dexterity with which a baboon seizes a scorpion and twists off the sting is remarkable.

It is only where there are orchards and lands at the base of a mountain, and the way of retreat is easy, that he becomes a nuisance. It is said that in such places he seizes young lambs, tears open their stomachs, and drinks the milk they contain ; but I have never heard of a specific case. In a great drought, when driven by hunger, he sometimes becomes troublesome. Then he has been known to enter the villages and hide in the gardens, for necessity takes no denial. Yet the baboons are easily frightened, and a little gun-firing scares them from a neighbourhood for days. Their depredations may be checked with a little vigilance. In the mountains close to our homestead, there used to be hundreds, and there are still a good few left ; but I have not known them to do any harm there, nor yet heard of it.

I have heard of the risks that men have run at their hands ; but I do not believe a word of it. Several times, and unarmed, I have watched them, less than 200 yards away, in large numbers, and they made no sign of hostility. I have hunted them, and been in their midst with gun and dogs, but they only tried to get away. With an old muzzle-loader, I shot a big male six feet off, and the burning powder set his shaggy mane ablaze. Pierced through the heart, he relaxed his length on the ground. I trod out the flame in his hair with my foot, and rolled him over. Beneath where he had lain, I recovered the flattened bullet, with its blood mark, embedded in the earth of the hard brak-pan! I had that bullet for years; but it has since been lost. Never did these baboons injure me; but they tore the dogs horribly, and killed a few, for they fought for their lives. And when you attempt to take their young, the great males will turn on you, and become heroic. Then there is peril, and it behoves you to be careful!

Some years ago I read an account, given out as true, in a pictorial magazine, of an adventure by two young men with a troop of baboons in South Africa. It stated that they had fired upon these baboons, and that the latter had followed and pressed closely upon them for miles; that only by their utmost endeavours had they kept them at bay, and that after firing repeatedly, the adventurers had at last escaped to the shelter of their quarters! Such a romance might interest people who know nothing of baboons.

In the lust of the chase (that was implanted in boys at the farms when they were mere children), I killed many baboons. I have often felt sorry for it since. It is perhaps well to keep their numbers in check; but it is not necessary to exterminate them. Their depredations have been grossly exaggerated, and I hope their destruction will not be carried too far. In another twenty-five years the scorpions and venomous spiders may become more troublesome than the baboons that we are at such pains to get rid of.

PART II

THE destruction of bats should be prohibited. They are worth their weight in gold. In the Great United States some towns have spent £20,000 each to build large lofts where they may live in security, and breed. They clear off the mosquitoes and flies, thus preventing the spread of disease, and making life more comfortable. Their dung is the finest natural fertilizer procurable, and more than repays the outlay, for it becomes a source of profit. Is this not worth the notice of our agricultural societies? If we ignore such things, how shall we ever attain to anything?

The destruction of all lizards should be penalized, on account of the ceaseless service they render in the catching of flies and other insects that they devour.

The killing of all non-venomous snakes should be strictly forbidden. Snakes are naturally the best mousers, because they can follow up the little animals in their holes and lurking places. *They* can best cope with the large army of mice that dwell in the endless mounds of holes in the veld. Even the destruction of venomous snakes should be regulated for the same reason. I have not yet heard of any one being killed by snake-bite in the Karroo. If you leave them alone, they will leave you alone.

The erstwhile order of things should be changed as regards the secretary bird. He should be classed as vermin so as to keep his greatly increased company in check. And the sparrow-hawk should be served likewise. Both these gentry take a vast toll of the useful birds and lizards, and fulfil no useful purpose as an offset. That the secretary bird sometimes kills a snake, is to-day only an aggravation of his misdeeds. The sparrow-hawk may catch an occasional mouse; but it is as nothing against the other things that we know he does.

Other suggestions may occur to those whose business it should be to give thought to these important matters. A wholesome preservation of the balance of Nature is of the utmost significance to farmers. Preserve your useful animals, preserve your veld, your water, your soil. Destroy when necessary; but be wise and be very careful what you do. Read the book of Nature and try to gather wisdom.

We have no house-sparrows in the Karroo now. I remember the time when there were many. But our cruelty has frightened them and they have all become tree-sparrows. (I am speaking of the bird *as to his habits*. I am not dealing with the species.) Nevertheless, the sparrows that *used* to build their nests in the walls of houses, and those that build in trees, are, and were always, *one* species in *this* country, and not *two* as some English people think. I should be sorry to figure out the consequences if the sparrows were destroyed. In England, some years ago, I made an estimate, on a most conservative basis, that during the nesting season there, the sparrows used up a minimum of 2,000 tons of grubs a day in feeding their young. It was possible that 10,000 tons was nearer the mark! The nestlings only devour soft insects. The hard grain, or crumbs, would kill them. The sparrows in England are probably as numerous as the rest of the small birds together. Yet the farmers there say that though they may take a ten per cent. toll of the crops, or even a little more, these same crops could not be reared without their assistance. In reality they do not take more than five per cent. At harvest-time, the birds, having toiled themselves to leanness in rearing the last of their brood for the season, repair to the fields. But a few hands to scare and keep them off during the brief period of ripening and reaping prevents any loss to speak of, and whatever the birds take, they have well and truly earned.

We require many sparrows that we may grow and rear large crops. We want a multitude of small birds that the orchards and the veld may be protected from the insect pests. We must enlarge and multiply our orchards, that we may produce enough for ourselves and our protectors. The common spectacle of a *sheep*-farmer in the Karroo with a small isolated orchard, indiscriminately poisoning thousands of little birds to save a handful of fruit, might be laughable, because it is so utterly ridiculous. But it is serious because it is so senselessly destructive ; it is tragic because it is so cruel, so wickedly wasteful and infinitely harmful in its results. There are many simple ways of protecting the fruit during the ripening. It means a little trouble ; but it is more than worth it. A lad with an old gun and a little powder can scare off the birds from a considerable area.

Long ago I knew an old Boer, not more than twenty miles from the Dorp, who could only read a little, and was just able to write his name. But he was full of wisdom. He had an extensive orchard and a fairly large land. He did not permit the destruction of the birds, not he! He had a Hottentot who had grown old in his service, and who had, in a general way, been superannuated. It was the duty of this Hottentot to keep the birds away from the fruit and the grain at the time of maturing and harvesting. He did it by cracking a long wagon-whip, and by occasionally firing an old gun when the birds became unusually persistent. That old Boer grew and gathered annually an abundance of the finest fruit in the district, and he regularly reaped excellent crops of cereals. He was, moreover, phenomenally successful as a sheep-farmer.

Part III

DESTRUCTION OF THE LOCUSTS

FIFTY years ago we destroyed the " voetgangers "—*foot* goers—the young locusts before they reached the flying stage. Nature pointed the way, as she always does. At night they swarmed together and slept in dense masses. On our farm, one evening, a large swarm went to roost in the dry mimosa-thorn hedge of our garden. They would have been inside next morning; but we were up in the chill of the dawn. There they hung, suspended on the twigs, thick as bees, millions of them, covering the white fence in dark and red patterns, for a length of forty yards. We pulled away the branches on either side of them, creating two wide safety gaps. Then we set a light to the isolated portion that lodged the sleeping locusts. They melted like wax, they roasted, they charred in the fierce blaze, and the odour of grilled voetgangers travelled afar on the keen morning air. We destroyed them utterly.

On another spring morning a large dark-red patch appeared on the veld, a little more than a mile away from the homestead. It was a mighty swarm of these voetgangers, in the depth of their beauty sleep. It was at the sunrise, and the chill of night had not yet departed. Quickly we opened the large kraal-gate, and let out the flock of sheep. We drove them to the camp of the sleepers. Forward and backward the sheep were herded over the masses of roosting locusts. They trampled them into a jelly, they trod them like slime into the dust and the bush. Only a few escaped that climbed up the legs of their dreadful crushers; but as a swarm they had ceased to be, and their place knew them no more!

Yet, only twenty years ago, our Government was endeavouring to destroy the flying locusts by paying a price per bag of them. Of course, the plan failed, because though many were killed, the result was quite ineffectual. They moved quickly and spread over the wide veld. It was like trying to empty out the river Nile with a bucket. The path that Nature had so clearly indicated was again sought. The roosting voetgangers were dealt with, and they were sprayed with deadly fluids. The new (?) method, and our old way of fifty years ago, were both successful. *We* did not spray them; but we destroyed them just as thoroughly.

AND OF THE "RISPERS"

Now, while our "rispers"—caterpillars—walk or crawl, we cannot deal with them. They move slowly; but they cover the face of the earth. The order must be reversed, or all efforts would be wasted. Unlike the locusts, we must concentrate on them when they are in the moth stage, and while they are yet flying. Again Nature shows a way, and has long and patiently pointed it out. Men look; but they do not see. Yet she speaks distinctly, and points directly—"lights and water!"

I remember the rispers fifty years ago. They did not get the upper hand then like they do now. The birds kept them down. The plains were covered with the useful larks; but the great drought of 1877 and 1878 destroyed all but a remnant of our little feathered friends. We have never troubled to protect them, and the specially shielded secretary bird and the sparrow-hawk have rendered it impossible, through their depredations, for their numbers to recover. So we are left to deal with the pest, and we turn to Nature once more. And great Nature is in kindly mood. She smiles and she says—"lights and water."

Have you seen the shepherd's fires nearly extinguished when the moths fly thickly? Have you noticed the railway lamps obscured by the encircling creatures? Have you noted, when a fire is lit near the edge of a dam of water, that countless numbers flit in and are drowned?

Well, then, if a lamp with a powerful light were placed close over a large shallow basin containing, say, twenty gallons of water, the moths would blunder in and perish. The light would draw them, and the water would drown them as fast as they came. I would start by placing the lamps two miles apart, so that twenty lamps, each with its basin, would cover a large farm. The moths flit about through the night, unless it happens to be cold, or very windy, and a bright light may draw them from 500 yards away. If two miles proved to be too great a distance, then try one mile, which would require eighty lamps instead of twenty. This number would surely suffice, and only a farm of extensive area would necessitate so many. The lamps should be lit each evening, and the dead moths scooped out of the basins at the same time. The water would have to be replenished, say, twice a week. All this would involve labour, time and money, but the herds with their families could each attend to some of the lamps, and about three men with horses, carts and water barrels could manage the remainder. The operations would be for a few weeks at most, while the moths were on the wing. There should, of course, be united effort among the farmers, so as to make the results effectual. The pest would thus be kept within bounds, and, as in the case of the locusts, there would be periods of immunity, so that the labour and attendant expense would not be continuous. The saving to the veld would be incalculable. The cost? Say £500 at the most, including equipment, material and labour, for the first year of effort, and after that an occasional £100 every third or fourth year, and possibly at longer intervals later on. This outlay would be for a large farm. It would be less over smaller areas. Then again, I am allowing for the whole extent of the farms; but the moths advance in belts, and generally only strips of the veld are visited. Government might, of course, take up the matter as in the case of the locusts. Otherwise, there should be co-operation, or legislation would be necessary to compel every farmer to do his part. A lot of money? Individual farmers have spent £2,000 in a drought to trek or rail their stock to distant parts, and to pay for the hire of grazing. Others sit tight, and it may cost them more. Some are ruined. The rispers do as much damage at times and places in one month as the drought does in a whole year. And when drought follows hard on their ravages, the effects are appalling. On this third day of January, 1920, I receive a letter from a farmer at Victoria West, Cape Province. He writes: "We have had a terrible time in these parts through the continued absence of rain. We had some in November, but the rispers ate up everything that grew, and we are as badly off as ever."

CHAPTER XXXI

KEEPING PETS

WHENEVER and wherever it is possible to do so, children should be allowed and encouraged to keep pets. I can think of nothing that will more profoundly influence their lives for good, or that will give them greater pleasure when they grow old and recall the days of their youth. It will keep them in touch with Nature, help to hold their minds well balanced, and to make their lives wholesome.

In the case of domestic animals, they should be taught to attend to their legitimate wants and their comfort. If they keep wild-animal, bird, or reptile pets, they should be directed to do so under the most reasonable conditions that the circumstances may permit, and to give them due and proper attention. And at all times the keepers should be taught to treat their charges with kindness, and be encouraged to minister to their well-being. They should, as far as possible, be provided with the food that they have been used to, or the most suitable substitute practicable. It is an unalterable principle that the best conditions yield the best results. Under such conditions, therefore, pets will thrive and look their best. They will be happy, and will thus the more brighten the lives of their owners, and, if they are animals of utility, they will prove still more useful. Moreover, it is the bounden duty of all, old and young, who hold the lives of dumb animals in their charge, on no account to abuse their trust. For not only do the creatures suffer undeserved penalties, but those who penalize them violate the sense of what is right, and themselves suffer mental and moral deterioration in consequence.

In a previous chapter I show how men of excellence may yet be strangely deficient in a right regard for the humbler creation, and may even go to the length of destroying defenceless animals for imaginary or trivial trespasses or offences, that could be prevented or checked by simple methods, which would render the destruction unnecessary. In such cases they sin innocently in so far as they are unaware of their own shortcomings. They have from their youth up been accustomed to hunt and destroy, and have never kept and cared for pets. As I count back the years to my childhood my most pleasant reminiscences concern the lives. of the many dumb charges, wild and domestic, that I have possessed. The memory of them is precious beyond words. I am growing old; but my little son and I still keep pets, and I shall always keep them!

CHAPTER XXXII

VALEDICTORY

FAREWELL, oh! sunny, peaceful, and dear old homestead in the beautiful valley, with your herds and your flocks, that raise the soft, impalpable, and clean white dust. Farewell, pretty mimosas, bearing the fragrant yellow blossom, and exuding the rich crystal gum; you gnarled karree-trees whose grateful shade shelters the weary traveller from the flaming sun on high, and who display your green and yellow berries. Farewell, the fruit-bearing trees of the pleasant orchard, and the grape-yielding vines; the limpid and cool river-pool, where swim the strong and far-leaping fish. Farewell, little ranges, great hills, and steep rugged mountains, flanked by the giant naked rocks, with your golden grasses that shed their honied sweetness on the northwind of the morning; your wooded kloofs and your great bosom throbbing with sound and with life; your rock-rabbits, your wild bucks, your badgers, your shouting baboons, your hyenas, your leopards, your vultures and your great kingly eagles; your ravens, your owls and your bushdoves; your lightning-winged swifts and your birds of brilliant plumage. Farewell, vast plains that stretch afar to the wide horizon, where the graceful bounding springbok runs free and spreads his white ruffle of glory; where fly the game birds—the pow, the knorhaan and the plover; where roams the towering and mighty-limbed ostrich; where walks the stately crane, and the dignified secretary bird disdainfully struts; where crouch the steenbok and the hare, and the monarch eagle swoops; where pounce the preying hawks, and the vultures soar on high; where rove the little larks and the brown birds, doing humble and useful service to man; where creep the lizards and the "kochel-manders" that nod their heads, who labour for us as they creep, though we regard not their worth. Farewell, burning, blistering droughts—a glad farewell; for you bring barrenness and desolation on the land, scorching the tender herbs with your flaming breath, uncovering the brown stones and laying bare the earth. You wither the grass and the flowers with the hot blast of your nostrils, and shrivel the young growth. Your blazing eyes make man and beast to cower and hide away, and cause the denizens of earth to droop and groan in anguish and distress. A sad farewell, oh! gentle and refreshing showers! that sink down into the sands and are sucked up by the thirsty earth; that rejoice the heart of man and make glad the lean sheep; that revive the weak and the faint ones, and refresh the beasts and the birds, bidding them go forth once more in their strength. Farewell, you great and grand ,rain-storms that the prison bars could no longer hold; that descend with the lurid lightning and shout in the mighty thunder; that batter upon the homestead and the plains, and shatter against the mountain rocks; that heap up many and swift waters, which leap like giants and carry havoc and destruction; you soft rains, and you angry irresistible torrents that put to flight the dreadful drought, cooling its blazing track with your moistening and soaking floods. Farewell, oh! illimitable veld and fragrant herbs; gay and sweet-smelling flowers, and green grassy borderings. Farewell, the golden grasses with their honey-laden dews, and all the beautiful plants that spring out of the dark earth to unfold their glories to the light of Heaven. Farewell, ye lonely graves of the lowly, humble, yet noble men, who toiled long and hard on the dear old farm, and were worthy of better things than the headstones that they *have* not, and that they did not desire—a reverent, a long, and a last farewell!

I stand upon life's hill-top, on the Great Karroo farm; I hear the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the cows, the even song of the birds and the insects, and the pretty calls of the night birds; I hear the voices of those that are far away, the dear ones gone before, as they mingle with the voices of earth and come very near. Shall I also hear the great voices—the grand, magnificent voices of untranslatable harmony, swelling in the glorious orchestra of Heaven?

I gaze upon life's setting sun, I see the rosy lights and the soft pink lights upon the clouds, the purple and the violet lights in the evening sky, and the pearly lights that lie within the vault of

Heaven. Shall I too behold the glorious lights and the lights of untold glory that dwell in the Great Beyond?

I look my last upon the old homestead, across the broad valley, on the hills, upon the great mountains, and over the wide plains. With an ineffable yearning I spread my arms to the cool southern breeze, I raise them aloft to the splendid sky, and I bid a final and an eternal

FAREWELL!

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The Author at the age of 32.

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